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A STRUGGLE FOR A SOUL

BY EDITH HINKLEY
AND MARIE L. CHRISTLIEB.

WITH 8 ILLUSTRATIONS

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A STRUGGLE FOR A SOUL

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A STRUGGLE FOR A SOUL

AND OTHER STORIES OF LIFE AND WORK IN SOUTH INDIA

1

BY

EDYTH HINKLEY

AND

MARIE L. CHRISTLIEB

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE
REV. R. WARDLAW THOMPSON, M.A.

'We have seen His star in the East'

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

I HAVE a special responsibility in connection with the following sketches of life and work in Southern India, and I feel a proportionate satisfaction in commending them to the attention of the public. It is always extremely difficult to enter into the conditions of other races, and to understand the influences which operate most powerfully on their thought and conduct. This is specially true of the contact of the West with the East. The ordinary traveller sees the country, the cities and buildings, he gets glimpses of the villages and of all the outward appearance of the people as they move to and fro, but he cannot speak their language, and is not in a position to know what they are thinking of; how they view things which may be to him of supreme importance; what influences operate most powerfully upon them; what ideas are dominating their lives.

It is safe to say there are hundreds of Europeans resident in the East who are equally ignorant of the people among whom they live. They never attempt to learn their language; they live in a world entirely apart from the natives, having nothing to do with them except in the very limited area of domestic service.

TRANSFER FROM C. O. SEP 1923

The two friends who have written these sketches have been fellow-workers for a number of years in a country mission station in Southern India. They have been in daily sympathetic contact with all classes of the people, especially with the village folk. They are careful observers, and, while they are intent on commending Christ to the people as the answer to all the deepest cravings of their natures and the true and only Saviour, they are broad-minded enough to try always to place themselves in the position of those among whom they are working, that they may fairly estimate their difficulties and enter into their ways of thinking.

When they were last in England I ventured to ask them to use the opportunities afforded by their work to make note of such incidents and experiences as might best illustrate the life of the people among whom they were labouring, and the way in which the Christian message and appeal affects them. The result has been the preparation of these sketches, which are vivid pictures from real life of the conditions under which missionary work is being carried on in the rural districts of Southern India.

I venture to think that no one will begin to read these sketches without wanting to read to the end. It will be surprising if the result is not a greatly increased interest in the people described, coupled with more intelligent sympathy with the hard yet joyous task of the Christian missionary among them.

R. WARDLAW THOMPSON.

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CHAPTER I

AN AFTERNOON IN TOWN

'East is East, and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet.'

IS it true? Perhaps. But we will make an effort nevertheless. So we go forth to attack the innermost citadel of Hinduism, the home.

The town lay bathed in the yellow sunlight of the very early afternoon as we started out; we two, one of us a representative of the East, and one of the West, nevertheless united by real ties of sympathy and affection; have we, at least, not met on a common ground?

But now we come to the East,—its squalor, its smells, its strangeness, its consciousness of superiority, its undying fascination. A little way along the main bazar street, where the *komaties*[1] in the shops are bending over hieroglyphic account books, while in the stalls grain is being measured out to purchasers,

[1] Merchants.

past the unattractive greasy sweetshop buzzing with flies, and the little 'English Emporium,' temptingly displaying brass buttons, kerosine oil and Manchester cotton goods, into a little alley that turned and turned bewilderingly, we reached our first house.

'Amma, are you busy?' my companion called out, as we stepped through a door in the mud wall into a little courtyard. Two women were at their toilet; that is, one was sitting still, while the other was combing her long black hair for her. Our entrance in nowise disturbed operations; the active one looked up and smiled, the passive slightly turned her head to glance at us, while a third young woman took up a broom and swept a portion of the little raised verandah, where we sat down by the other two. An elderly woman came from the inner room with a winnowing basket in her hand and mutely sat down with us, continuing the winnowing of her millet, which she threw up so skilfully and easily that I watched her with much admiration. The family was a new one to me.

'How are you related?' we began the conversation.

'This is my daughter,' replied the older woman, 'and that my younger sister. This one is my sister's child.'

'And how many men are in this house?'

'Only one, my son.'

'Then is your husband dead?'

'Yes, and my sister's husband, and that girl's husband. It is our fate. What can we do?'

One of the others nudged my companion.

'Who is she?' pointing to me. 'What has she come for?'

Before Siromani could answer the outer door was pushed open violently, and another woman marched in, staring at us curiously, then turned to the mistress, 'Gangamma, a little *chunam*,[1] please.'

Gangamma pulled out a bag with three pockets, from which she extracted a leaf. This she unrolled and smeared a little *chunam* on the proffered leaf of the petitioner, who promptly rolled up a little betel nut with it, with a deft movement threw the concoction into her mouth, and then squatted down chewing comfortably.

'To teach some words of righteousness,' Siromani began to explain; but the newcomer took up her words scoffingly.

'Words of righteousness! Now if you had come to tell us how to get higher wages, that would be some use! Here they have how many family cares and troubles, and there's only the one son to earn something. Teach them how to get more money.'

'Listen, Amma,' I tried to interrupt the stream. Curiosity stemmed it effectually.

[1] Ordinary carbonate of lime, which is rubbed on a betel leaf and chewed as a delicacy with areca nut.

'She talks Telugu,' one of them remarked, and the silence gave me a chance.

'This country is not my country, and I like to learn its ways. So I listen to people's talk. As I walk in the bazar I try to catch what people say. And it is always one thing they talk about: always, always, it is money. I suppose they talk about something else sometimes, but this is what I always hear. And you see now as I come into a house this is the first word to greet me. Is it not true?'

'Yes, it is true. But what is the use of all other things if you have not money to buy rice with and live? And how can we fold our hands together and pray, "Swami, Swami," when we are poor and have to work all the time?' She turned her head aside for a moment to eject some betel leaf.

'Would you like to hear a story?'

'Oh yes, tell us.'

They like stories as children do.

'There was once a man who had a precious heirloom. It was a diamond worth thousands of rupees. He kept it in a box which was always locked. He never looked inside, as it was very difficult to open. And the box itself was very pretty, painted all red and blue and green, so he liked to look at it, and had it always about him. Now once this man had to go on a journey, and, of course, took the box too. At night he had to stay in a *chutrum*,[1] and when he

[1] Native rest-house.

was asleep some thieves came. While feeling about very softly for his money they came upon the little case; they snatched it up and ran away. The man woke up, and instantly felt for his box. It was gone. But there, in the moonlight, he saw the thieves running, so he started in pursuit. The robbers did not wish to be tracked to their lair, so they stopped and told him to go back.

'"I want my box!" he shouted. The thieves laughed.

'"He says nothing about the diamond; perhaps he is mad," they conjectured.

'"Which will you have, the box or the diamond?" they asked in mockery. The man reflected.

'"I never see the diamond. But I am used to the box. I like to look at it and have it about me. I should miss it dreadfully. But I should not miss the diamond; I cannot tell whether it is there or not. Give me the box!" he cried.

'The thieves thought he really must be out of his mind, but one of them ran back and gave him what he asked for. The man took the empty box, and was contented.

'Now what kind of a man do you think he was?'

'He was a fool. Who would let go a diamond for a box?'

'Well, I too think he was very foolish. But are you never like him?'

'We? we would never do such a silly thing.'

'You are doing it now.'

As we explained the meaning of the little parable, a smile gradually broadened on the faces of the women. The one with the grain basket stopped winnowing and looked up earnestly.

'What are we to do then? we must live.'

'Oh yes! But to care for the body is not everything. Care a little for your diamond too.'

'I know,' said the last comer, in a voice still strident, but slightly subdued. 'They tell us to leave off worshipping our gods and worship theirs. Why should we? It is all one. We say Ram Ram, or Krishna Krishna, and they say Yesu Swami. How could we leave off our customs?' Her voice grew shrill again.

'I know it must seem impossible to you now,' we replied. 'You have always done this, and why should you, at the bidding of a stranger, who you say knows nothing of your life and needs, leave the old ways? When we are gone you will say, "What do they know about us? come, let us do our cooking." But, Amma, do you not sometimes feel dissatisfied? Do you not ever want a more real help and love than Krishna can give you?'

The older woman had dropped her basket, and watched us wistfully. We turned to her.

'Will you not ask God to give you light and to show you the right way?'

'Yes, I will ask Him,' she assented, and fell to her

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(I.) VILLAGE IDOLS
(II.) DESTROYED BY THE OWNERS WHEN THEY BECAME CHRISTIANS.

work again. The toilet of the daughter was finished some time ago; she had moved away and was breaking sticks for firewood. The girl with the broom had disappeared into the house when the story part of the conversation was over. The owner of the shrill voice regarded us with interest. A thought had dawned upon her.

'Well, what is it, Amma?'

'If I come and join your religion will you give me rice to live on?'

'No.' We were not surprised that our friend's thoughts had taken this turn, for we had learnt by now how rarely one finds a soul who can conceive of the reality or desirability of any but material good. After some words of explanation we left with rather heavy hearts, and passed into the street again.

Winding our way between the houses we came to a little open space. A margosa and a banyan tree here grew so close together that their branches and leaves intertwined; a little platform had been built round the bases of the trunks, a few significant marks, yellow and red, were smeared on the trees; three or four curiously shaped stones leant against them—the meaning was obvious, 'sacred trees,' because 'wedded.' Just as we were about to pass, a figure came into view on whom I could not help gazing.

A Brahman widow, devoid of ornaments, her head closely shaven, a scanty white cloth barely cover-

ing her decently, her arms laden with brass pots, approached the little platform. The pots were deposited; from a bundle she drew a little camphor, sprinkled it before the stones, and mounting the platform began walking round the tree, muttering. Each time she came round to the idols she prostrated herself flat upon the ground, touched it with her forehead and nose, got up, walked round again, prostrated herself, knocked the ground, up again, round, down, up, in endless continuance. I watched in fascination; some women passing by laughed at my wonder.

'She is only doing *pradakshanam*.'[1]

'What for?'

'Who knows? To get merit, perhaps.'

A Komati woman approached the tree, a different figure, in a brilliantly coloured cloth, laden with jewels; she, too, began the circumambulations and mutterings, but her prostrations were not so painstaking, for the most part she merely bowed and cast continual side glances at us. Her heart did not seem much in the matter. The Brahman woman went on and on, absolutely absorbed, shirking nothing, observing no one. The Komati woman presently gave up altogether and climbed down, casting curious glances in our direction. My companion turned to her.

'Why are you doing pradakshanam?'

[1] Pradakshanam is the name for the ceremony of circumambulating a sacred spot, such as temples, shrines, idols, &c.

'I have a stomach-ache,' she answered stolidly.

'Would it not be better to take medicine?'

'I did take some.'

'How often?'

'Twice. I was not better then, so I thought I would try pradakshanam.'

From her manner of trying pradakshanam one could understand she did not persevere with the medicine. Slowly she walked away, leaving me wishing to prescribe her a daily game of tennis, or even pradakshanam a little more vigorously! But I am a Western, and ignorant.

The Brahman widow was still at her devotions, unhurried, unheeding, unfatigued. My own back ached in sympathy as I watched her. What was her heart's desire? It could not be, alas! that wish which often moves Indian women to strenuous prayers—the desire for a son. Round and round the tree she went, eight or ten steps completed the round, and so within a minute of each other the prostrations followed. She never shirked one; she did not try to hurry or make the uncomfortable posture more easy. Was it the consciousness of present sin that drove her to this earnestness? Or the belief that unknown sins in former lives, perhaps the causes of her widowhood, were still waiting to be expiated? Was her life so hard that she was praying for it to end? At last she remained in a kneeling position; her hands high above her head, palms flat against

each other, she bowed low repeatedly and knocked her head against the tree—evidently the finale.

Her brass pots were gathered up, and she walked away in the direction of the bank, a solitary, pathetic figure, casting us one glance of unutterable disdain as she passed. Hard as her life may be, despised widow as she is, still she is a Brahman, and as such entitled to regard the rest of the world as scum beneath her feet, and is ready to resent as an insult any unsolicited advance on our part. In silent pity and respect we let her pass on her unlighted, unbefriended way, yearning for an opportunity to hold out a ray of comfort to her, but feeling it unwise to force one. She disappeared down the steps leading to the water.

Sadly we turned away in the direction of our next house, but a young woman standing on the threshold of her door beckoned us in, and we obeyed the summons. No courtyard, no verandah this time, just one small, dark, windowless room, boasting no furniture, not even the ordinary *charpoy*.[1] A mat was spread on the floor, and here we squatted with the inmates, only two women, sisters.

'I wanted your Missiamma to come,' said the elder one to the Biblewoman.

'Why?' I asked.

'I thought, perhaps, you could give some medicine to my younger sister.'

[1] Native bedstead.

'What is the matter with her?' looking inquiringly at the girl, so young still, crouching listlessly in her corner.

'Boils,' the elder one answered laconically.

It occurred to me to inquire further. Distressing revelations were made; clearly it was a case for skilled medical treatment. We urged the elder one to send her sister to the mission hospital at Jammalamadugu, but she looked indifferent.

'Who would take her?'

'Could not her husband?'

'Oh! he does not care. And besides we could not pay the rail-fare.'

Here the Biblewoman, knowing the futility of our advice about the hospital, chimed in—

'Shall we sing you a lyric?'

'Oh yes, please, do sing!' They apparently never weary of listening to singing. We chose 'Jesus, the sinner's refuge.' In this house the words seemed to have a peculiar significance. The two young women listened amicably enough to the explanations, but their minds seemed elsewhere. We soon took leave.

'You will favour us again?' they asked politely.

'Yes, if you really wish it. *Salaam*, we come.'[1]

The next house was that of a Mahommedan woman, a cheerful, friendly creature, but her aspect that day

[1] 'Having gone, I come,' is the Kanarese and Telugu phrase for taking leave, generally shortened into 'I come.'

horrified me. Where her eyebrows should have been were masses of open, running sores.

'What have you done to your eyes?' we asked.

'Oh! I had so much headache,' she answered cheerfully, 'so they put some stuff on my eyes. It always makes sores; now my head will be better.'

Certainly she could not be afflicted with much personal vanity, or she would never have allowed the counter irritant to be applied just over her eyes. She sat down by us on the pail, a little raised over the rubbish and dust which were littering the rest of the courtyard. In bliss and nakedness a little fellow was rolling about there on a mat.

'How many sons have you?'

'Three.'

We looked our congratulations, but before we had time to express them they were cut short.

'One lame, one deaf and dumb; the fortune is not great, is it?' she said with a laugh. It did not seem to oppress her deeply.

'It is the will of God, what can we do?'

Her sister came out of the house and pulled a handful of thatch from the roof. The woman remonstrated.

'Have you not twigs to light the fire with?'

The other shrilled something in return I could not catch, but went off with her thatch; the first subsided good-naturedly. It was evidently a somewhat shiftless, untidy household.

Two men came in and sat down near us. She introduced them as her brother and her eldest son.

'There is to be a big festival to-morrow; my brother has come in from his village for that.'

'What do you do at this festival?'

'We go to Babai's tomb and worship there.'

'And does it do you any good?'

'No good at all. It is our custom.'

'Well, let us tell you about some prayer that does good. Once there was a glorious temple in a country far from here, and many people went to worship there. One day two men went up to pray, one was a great shastri, and very rich, the other was a low-caste man. When the shastri went in every one bowed and salaamed. He then stood up to pray, look, like this. Here is his picture, and this is what he said: "God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people who sin. I am glad I was not born in a low caste, like the man over there. I fast twice a week and give much alms to the poor." Do you think that was a good prayer?'

'Oh yes! a very good prayer.'

'I do not think it was.'

Amazement looked from every face.

'But why not?'

'Well, God is holy, is He not, and are not we all sinners? When we poor, sinful creatures speak to Him must we not first of all say, "I have done wrong, I am not worthy to come to Thee, forgive me my sins"? GOD—think for a moment—He, the One

above all. May any of us stand up before Him and say, "I am a great and meritorious person"?'

'No, no! we must not, it is true.'

'Now look at this other man in the picture, standing behind bowing down. He had done many bad things, but he was very sorry. He could not make a big prayer like the other, he did not know how, he was only low caste. But he said just these few words, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And in our holy Veda we read that God was pleased with that prayer, and accepted it because it came from a humble and contrite heart. Will you learn this little prayer and pray it yourselves?'

'Yes, that is a good prayer,' the woman agreed. 'We pray like that. Swami, thy favour! Thou art our fate, thou our help!'

'But we want you to pray more than that. We must talk to Him about our needs and our sins. Will you not learn this, "God be merciful to me, a sinner"?'

Timidly the woman repeated it. She was evidently afraid the mere saying of the exact words we taught might have some mysterious effect. One of the men encouraged her by repeating it himself. They were all quite pleased now with this acquisition, and said it over and over again. A new difficulty suggested itself to our minds.

'It is not a *mantram*,'[1] we warned them. 'The

[1] Charm, or incantation.

mere repeating it will be no good. You must really mean it. Think for a little first to Whom you are speaking, and how much we need His mercy.'

But our friend had had enough teaching for that day. She disappeared into the house, and bringing out a basketful of cholum poured some of it into a deep hole in a big stone, and seizing a club-like stick began to pound it, pushing back with her foot the grains that flew out. So we took leave.

It was rather a relief in the next house to come into a clean and tidy place. There was even a bench for us to sit on, and the mistress welcomed us warmly. A very small person clad in a silver-braided jacket and loose trousers coming down to the ankles clung to her skirts.

'Is this your little son?'

'No, it is a girl.' She smiled at my mistake, but the voice sounded sad.

'But you have dressed her like a boy?'

Siromani came to my aid. 'She has four daughters, this is the youngest. They wanted a boy so much that they dress up this little one like a boy, to satisfy the heart's desire.'

'Ah!'

I looked at the woman in sympathy, and she smiled back silently. We can hardly understand the passionate longing in the heart of an Eastern woman for a son. All life seems fruitless and empty to her because of that one unfulfilled desire.

Comfort there is none. But somehow one must attempt it.

'In my country,' I ventured, 'we are just as pleased with daughters as with sons.'

'Ah, yes!' she answered quickly, 'but your country is so different. With us every woman wants a son. What can we do? They are given through God's favour. But will you not sing something?'

One's heart went out to the gentle, sad woman. We chose a lyric about 'Jesus, our Friend.' It seemed easy to speak to her of this unfailing Friend from Whose sympathy no matters are excluded, and Who understands our deepest heart hunger. Her attention never flagged.

'They are good words,' she said thoughtfully.

The sun had sunk low. Some one had kindled a fire in the kitchen close by. The smoke began to fill this room and choke us.

'Amma, you want to cook now.' We rose and bade her goodbye.

She accompanied us to the door.

'When are you coming again?'

'In a week or two, I hope,' and we stepped out into the noisy, dusty bazar street, hurrying, as we were anxious to visit one more house. A mother lived there with two daughters who had asked to be taught fancy work, but where so far the way had not seemed open for teaching anything else. That day we went to the house with diffidence, for Siromani

had told me on the way how sorrow had entered the home. The youngest child, a lad of about twelve or thirteen, had died recently of typhoid fever. If they had not been very anxious to see us when it was well with them, would they wish to receive us now when grief had stricken their hearts?

Siromani thought they would. She had been to see them since the sad event, and found them ready to listen for the first time.

So we went, and it was as she had said; the two young girls were quiet and subdued, and the mother begged us to read. When we explained to her the faith of the Christian, how we sorrow not as those without hope, she listened with many tears, and began to tell us about the little lad.

'He was such a good boy! He would always go to the Christian service when he could; when he was ill he asked for a Bible to be laid by his pillow, and wanted his elder brother to read to him, and he prayed himself so beautifully—and now he is gone!' And the tears flowed afresh, though the usual noisy, distressing Oriental manifestations of grief were wholly absent.

'But where did he go to a Christian service, and where did you get the Bible, and where did he learn to pray?' we asked in wonder.

'When we were in Madras. Some of our caste people there are Christians.'

So in the soil that had seemed so hard the seed

had already been sown, and when sorrow softened the ground it began to spring. What may not the memory of her little son's prayers and his leaning towards the Christian life do for the mother? Perhaps, as sometimes before, 'a little child shall lead them.' With thankful, hopeful hearts we bade them farewell.

The darkness was falling fast as we hurried home, thinking many thoughts and with mixed feelings, but hoping that the afternoon's work had been one more stroke of the million needed to impress the hard rock. To-morrow would find us in the same quarters again, quarters where we habitually visit rich houses and poor houses; sorrow-stricken houses where the only son has died; comfortable houses where self-satisfaction reigns, and our coming is regarded with mild wonder if not indifference; houses of the English educated, where we are hospitably treated to coffee and sweets and listened to politely, too politely; houses of the uneducated, more receptive on the whole, and warm-hearted, who act according to their manners and not according to ours, who, for instance, do not mind running away in the middle of being spoken to, if it occurs to them to finish a certain job, or if they do not approve of what they hear; houses—a few—where they listen with intelligent interest and perhaps even sympathy; houses—many—where our words sound as a strange fairy tale, satisfying their curiosity and forming an interesting

interruption to the humdrum of their daily lives, and nothing more.

Set in their ways for hundreds of generations there comes upon them suddenly the breath of an alien thought. Will it affect them? Not often perceptibly; but it is bread cast upon the waters, and we wait in hope, remembering the 'after many days.' We of the West fight here in India not with flesh and blood, but with the traditions and habits of a thousand lifetimes. Is it likely we shall win? Their lives and thoughts and ours are divided by a great gulf. Is it possible for us to meet?

'They shall come from the East and from the West, and shall sit down in the Kingdom.'

CHAPTER II

'GREAT EXPECTATIONS'

THE sun had just leapt above the horizon as we left our tent and came out into the freshness of the morning for early tea, wondering, as we discussed it, what would be our experience in the village we hoped to visit that day. It was one we had not been to before, and a refreshing sense of new possibilities accompanies the unknown in village-preaching as in other things. One cannot help thinking, 'Perhaps here, where the Gospel of the love of God has probably never been heard before, we shall find hungry hearts waiting for it.'

It was not many minutes before we were on our way with our much-loved Biblewoman. For the most part it was a footpath through what should have been fields of graceful and opulent cholum, one of the noblest of Indian cereal growths, with its immense height, and dark, shining, sword-like leaves, each having its own lovely lines of rippling twist and curve—queen of grains indeed! I have seen fields

of it, in the dried tank bed of Kotturu, fourteen or fifteen feet in height—beside which a man looked dwarfed—mirroring on its gleaming surface every cloud that floated overhead, and vibrating to the passing wind with a slow and stately grace, and a low sound not unlike 'the multitudinous laughter of the sea.'

But it was only potential cholum that we saw that morning, and hardly that, for although the monsoon season was well advanced the rain had not fallen, and the early growth had been scorched by the unrelenting sun into a miserable and hopeless failure. Alas, for the hundreds in the neighbouring villages who would have to go hungry in the coming harvest-time!

A considerable crowd gathered about us as we took our stand in the centre of the village under a large margosa-tree; and, as we spoke of the pure and gracious life of the Redeemer of men, of His unfailing compassion, His never-wearied help, His unconquerable love, the dark faces gazed at us more earnestly and seemed to gather a certain light and hopefulness. Now and then a very small child, to whom the white woman and her strange speech was an unmitigated terror, ran away screaming to hide its face in its mother's *sira;* and once or twice the whole population had to shift its ground to make way for the herd of cattle which stamped along its accustomed road, resenting the unusual impedimenta

in its course. But with these exceptions nothing interfered with the earnest interest of our listeners.

At the close we were about to turn our faces homewards, when our attention was arrested by a little procession of people moving slowly towards us, and guiding a girl of about fourteen in our direction. Her outstretched, groping hands, and pathetic, unseeing eyes told their own tale; but on the faces around her the light of confident hope was shining, and there was a ring of almost triumph in their voices as they crowded about us, saying: 'See, we have brought her to you, you will cure her; she has been blind from her birth, but you will ask your kind Swami, of Whom you have been telling us that He cured the sick and made the lame to walk and the dumb to speak and the blind to see, and He will give this poor child sight too. Oh, quickly open her eyes, Amma!'

It was one of those moments when old and burning questions invade the heart again with a rush. How could we explain to those poor, believing folk, in any way satisfactory to them, the difference between those days and these, or the superiority of the spiritual to the physical miracle? Or how say anything that would compensate for our inability to assure them that this poor girl's eyes should be opened?

In spite of what we did say, however—and it will readily be granted that we needed a very special

grace of wisdom—they persisted in regarding our non-compliance with their request as a lack of will, not of power, and continued their piteous pleading: 'Oh, have compassion upon the child! Think how unhappy her parents and relations have been all these years; think how she can never be married as she is; and cure her blindness, Amma!'

When at last they grasped that these prayers were of no avail, they brought another petition: 'If you will not cure our blind girl, do something else for us. Look at the sky, bright and blue instead of black with clouds and storm, as it ought to be. Look at our fields with their dying crops, when the cholum ought to be as tall as a man by now. We shall soon be dying men and women if no rain falls. Oh, quickly make it come, and save our crops and our lives!'

Again we stood perplexed. What could we do but assure them that although we could not send them rain we would pray to God to help and pity them? Alas, the times of dearth and famine were to continue four or five years more!

Grieved at being unable to aid these poor folk in the ways they most needed, we looked about us to see whether there was no help of a simpler nature which it would be possible for us to render.

Close at hand we saw a baby boy whose head was one mass of dreadful sores. His mother assented eagerly when we suggested treating them, but

demurred when we explained that the first item in the treatment must be a thorough ablution. We carried our point, however, with some difficulty, only to encounter another obstacle when we asked that the water should be warm. But, indeed, neither warm nor any other kind of water could avail to cleanse that poor little head with its matted tangle of indescribable hair, and we soon found that it would be necessary to cut the hair off before we could begin to treat the trouble beneath.

So this, with the courage of ignorance, we suggested. We were standing in the centre of the village street, and a protesting chorus arose from the mouths of many mothers: 'Cut his hair off! No, no, it is impossible; it is vowed to Naraina Swami; he would sink to hell if the vow were broken.'

Baffled again we had to leave the poor baby to his pain and his dirt, and look for another opportunity of service with which Naraina Swami would not interfere.

We had not long to look. A woman, who was standing in the village street watching our operations, stepped eagerly forward, holding up for our inspection a little child whose legs were covered all over with the same open sores as disfigured the head of Naraina's *protégé*. So we took mother and son with us to our tent, and after washing the ulcers with disinfectant went inside to get carbolised vaseline to dress them. This, however, had been unfortunately

(I.) BATHING THE BABY.
(II.) GRINDING CURRY STUFF.

forgotten, and the only emollient we could lay our hands on was our butter, which we accordingly used. The mother came daily until the child's legs were healed, and so far as we know this simple cure was the only result of our village work that morning.

CHAPTER III

IN CAMP

WHITE and silent the wide plain lay under a burning midday sun. Not a leaf stirred; the only movement seemed to be that of the hot quivering air, which you could see vibrate for a foot or two above the ground. Thick dust covered the scanty leaves of the few tamarind and olive trees dotting the desert which stretched away to the horizon. Occasionally that was broken by low ranges of rocky hills which, when the sun set behind them, would look dreamy and purple and picturesque, but, standing in its direct rays revealing their barren stoniness, looked like veritable hills of the dead.

Like a long snake the apparently endless road wound over the plain, distinguished by an extra glare and whiteness from surroundings where all was white and glaring, in places lined by margosa or banyan trees, or sometimes, less pleasantly, by the disagreeable prickly pear or bluish-grey aloe bushes the sharply serrated edges of their tough-fibred leaves

keeping unnecessary guard over the barren wilderness beyond, where drowsy herds of buffaloes and goats were here and there attempting to wrest a living from an unwilling, sun-dried, sun-baked soil. Exhaustion—almost stupor—crept over one as the burning atmosphere seemed to penetrate one's very being. Oh, for the shadow of a great rock in this weary land, or the cool, green darkness of some great tree!

Along the well-worn ruts of this dusty road our country carts came slowly trundling. The bullocks moved mechanically, the driver squatting drowsily on the pole, too hot and sleepy to exert himself to guide the animals and keep his conveyance out of the way of stones, so that the springless concern was jolted and bumped in a way which made you devoutly hope that there were no breakable goods inside.

One of them was laden with the ordinary camp appurtenances of a European travelling in the district—tent, table, chairs, folding cot, and boxes and bundles of various descriptions, into the composition of which it were well not to inquire too closely. For our prejudices in the way, for instance, of keeping the portion of cold fowl which is to form your supper *not* wrapped up in a kitchen towel with which the sooty outside of a saucepan has just been wiped, are by no means shared by our native cooks. In such matters in India 'twere clearly folly to be wise.

The second cart contained the Biblewoman and

myself, owners of these attractive paraphernalia. In the hope of reaching the camping place before night we had started early in the afternoon. There were eighteen miles to go, but in this hot weather the oxen will not even cover two miles of the road in an hour.

The procession jogged on wearily; slowly the sun sank lower, and the shadows grew gigantic; presently a halt was called, and the evening meal was taken, gipsy fashion, by the roadside. The oxen, too, got a drink of water from a well in the fields, and, somewhat refreshed, we started on our way again.

How slowly the mile-stones went by! Surely we must be nearly there now?

'Six miles more,' was the sleepy reply of the driver.

'Why, that is another three hours at least! We shall not arrive till midnight,' was our dismayed rejoinder.

And neither did we. The flaming West dulled into darkness; from villages we passed we heard signs of life, as the population began to enjoy the comparative coolness of the night. Occasionally the howl of a jackal broke in dismally on one's reveries; otherwise how quiet was the night, how weird, how mysterious, how alive!

What was that gleam of whiteness through the dark? Only a Mariamma, an idol some villagers had carried out and provided with food and cooking utensils, thus courteously indicating their desire that

the deity might make itself at home at a distance from their dwellings. Probably they had cholera or small-pox in the village, and were thus seeking to rid themselves of the trouble.

'Nearer, my God, to Thee!

Thus we dare to pray—we on whom 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' has begun to dawn. But what prayer was indicated by the little idol placed here in the wilderness far away from human habitations?

'Let not God come near to us, lest we die.' 'And even unto this day . . . the vail is upon their hearts.'

The bullocks still jogged on slowly, steadily, in the hot night air; a breeze sprang up, but far from being refreshing it made the skin tingle with a disagreeable sensation of being scorched. The Southern Cross rose higher from the horizon, Scorpio began to trail its glorious length over the night sky; the sounds in the villages died away, the weary world around went to sleep. At last, a few minutes before midnight, the carts came to a standstill in the little wood, or 'tope,' near the village which was our destination, and the silence of sleep soon reigned in the little encampment.

At break of day every one was astir. Tent-pegs were driven in, poles erected, close by the kettle boiled for the early cup of tea. The 'saman' still lay about in dire disorder; but the servant knew his

business, and we were at liberty ourselves to turn to the work of the day.

Apart from the houses of the respectable people stands, as always, the little cluster of huts where dwell the low caste.

In the Telugu district the larger section of these is called the Malas. The contempt in which they have been held for thousands of years has had its effect upon them. At last they have begun to believe about themselves what others have told them so unceasingly; not once, or twice, but scores of times we have heard their apathetic response to appeals to their higher instincts: 'Why do you talk to us? We are just like cattle'; and to the writer there seems no worse indictment of Hinduism than this, that it has crushed out of so many fellow-men their belief in their own right to be human.

Their religion can only be described as a bundle of crude superstitions, demonolatry indeed! There is nothing in their consciousness of the deeply philosophic mind the West generally ascribes to the East; and, indeed, the pressure of their daily lives leaves them little room for any but material cares.

Practically the Malas occupy the position of serfs to the caste community of the village, for whom they till the ground and receive, in good times, a living wage in return. But the margin which divides them from want is so small that, when the harvest is poor and prices rise, even a little hunger begins to pinch

them; and if hard times continue they will be the first to go over the brink of starvation. The question of daily bread is therefore a paramount one in their minds.

Into this dark corner of Hinduism the light of the Gospel has penetrated. For years there has been a movement among the Malas towards Christianity. In the older Telugu mission districts the converts and adherents now count by the thousand, in those where work has but recently been started, at least by the score.

When these people have signified their willingness to forsake idolatry and adopt the Christian faith, the missionary's work has reached the point, so to speak, where it can begin. Everything yet remains to be done. Generally speaking, it is true that hearts and minds steeped for centuries in practical materialism cannot rise to spiritual heights all at once, though there may be individual exceptions. It is to the children that one turns most hopefully. Here we have, if not virgin soil, at least some approach to it; and Christian ideas and ideals can be instilled into their plastic and receptive minds. We wended our way to school, then, that morning, as the first item in the day's work.

Past the houses of the caste people, meeting the herds of village buffaloes and goats, trailing by us pasturewards; past the better-dressed women ornamenting their doorsteps with red-coloured earth and

white chalk lines, over a sandy, rutty land meant for a path, we walked to the thatch-covered huts of the Malas. Close by was a black and evil-looking pond where a dozen little pigs were wallowing; we hurried on, for good reasons. The train of juvenile followers had swelled to considerable dimensions by this time; the sight of a white person remains to them an unfailing *tamasha*.[1] Choruses of 'Salaam!' greeted us now on every hand, and as we neared the schoolhouse the commotion increased.

A little boy disappeared round the corner with all speed in a cloud of dust; he probably was the one who was warned last time that Nature's apparel was not sufficient for school, and was rushing home now in breathless haste to ask his mother for something to put on. We hoped that even the transitory virtue caused by the panic of our immediate arrival was at least a step in the right direction.

We entered the schoolhouse. 'Salaam! Salaam!' resounded a chorus, hearty if inharmonious, as a row of little figures rose from the ground.

'Salaam! Sit down again.' We looked at them critically.

'Serubabel,[2] go and wash your face. You, too, Abednego. Karma, have you no jacket? Where is

[1] Spectacle.

[2] The Christians are fond of choosing rather extraordinary Bible names sometimes. The names mentioned are all names of children in our district.

(I.) THE BULLOCK MOVED MECHANICALLY.
(II.) THE LITTLE IDOL PLACED IN THE WILDERNESS.
(III.) CHORUSES OF 'SALAAM!' GREETED US.

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the one your mother sewed for you? Worn out? You must learn to sew one yourself now. Sundri, your hands are not clean; run and get tidy. Abraham, how can you come in with such a dirty face?' And so forth. It usually ends in the whole lot being turned out to perform ablutions. In a few minutes they reappear, scrubbed and shining, some still streaky where the water has dripped unperceived from the face on the dusty little chests. The boy mentioned above made his appearance with a marvellous rag of an old towel—gathered, who knows where?—thrown over his shoulder; we took the will for the deed, and, suppressing a smile, began serious business.

'The attendance-register, please.' Anxiously and carefully it was scanned.

'Why has Jacob's eldest boy not been to school for two months?'

'Oh, he has gone to Royapuram.'

'How is that?'

'Jacob owed money to a Shudra there, and as he could not pay the debt, was, indeed, getting always more deeply into it, he has given them the boy.[1] It is a very old affair. The debt was contracted before he became a Christian, and the boy had been promised long ago, as soon as he should be old enough to be useful. So he has gone now.'

We sighed and passed on.

[1] An ordinary mode of procedure among Malas.

'Why is Swami Das so irregular? He is absent a fortnight at a time. He is quite a small boy, is he not? He ought to come every day.'

'Yes, he is only seven or eight. But his mother says she has no one to mind the buffalo. She cannot afford to pay the village herdsman; and, besides, when she did try him once or twice he always stole the milk. So Swami Das must go, she says.'

'Well, you must tell her that she must find some other way. Remind her that every parent promised on coming to us to send their children to school. Whatever temporary loss is involved, the little ones must come.'

'Very well; but it will be very difficult.'

'No doubt; most things are that are worth doing. But why is Jivi not on the register at all; surely she is old enough now?'

'Yes, she is six. But there is Shanti, the baby. Her mother does not send her because she goes out to coolie all day herself, and Jivi looks after the baby.'

'Sarah must take the baby with her. Lots of coolie women do. Or, if it is very far, the baby must come here sometimes.'

The teacher looked rueful; and our sympathy was secretly with him, for there seemed to be quite enough interruptions already; but what was to be done? One lyrical baby more would not make much difference, and our faces remained hard.

'And Esther, she was always regular. Why does she come only once or twice a month now?'

'The family are in such difficulties. They hardly ever have enough to eat, and since the famine they are worse than ever. If each child does not help to earn a little each day, it makes a great difference at the evening meal. As it is, they have only one meal a day half the time; indeed, I have known them to have one only every other day. Half the families are in that condition.'

To this there was no answer. Even the most stony-hearted school-inspecting missionary could not press for a decision in favour of education when the alternative stands thus—school and no food, or food and no school.

'But the two big boys, Manoah and Sushila, why are they not coming now? I thought that family had a little land of their own and were not in such a desperate state.'

'No, but they have to go out with the men to work in the irrigation canal. The *Riddi*[1] has ordered them to go.'

'Well, then, they must have night school. You must make them read after they come home from work. It is a pity they should forget what they have learnt.'

'Yes, I have tried to get them to come. But they always say they are so tired when they come

[1] Village magistrate. This order is within his power.

back. Or else so hungry they must have their meal first. And after that they are so sleepy they cannot keep awake.'

'Still, try again.' But our hearts sank rather at these endless difficulties in the way of Mala education. It was always the same; and looking round we could hardly be surprised at the smallness of the numbers.

'Well, now, let us see what they have learnt. Infant standard, rise!' With smiling, confident faces some six or eight little figures wriggled up from the ground. A primer was handed to number one.

'Read!'

With marvellous fluency he got through the page.

'Stop! Read this word,' pointing to one in the middle of the lesson just read. He stared hard, looked up, smiled, stared again, shook his head.

'I thought so. He knows it all by heart. Number two, read the letters backwards!'

No more fluency now. Still, some progress has been made, at least among the regular comers.

Mothers with babies on their hips had come in and watched admiringly the wonderful performances of their offspring, or nudged them freely to exert themselves more when they remained dumb at a question. The teacher aided them in this, apparently under the impression the loud repetitions of

a question would elicit a speedy and correct answer. We were at mental arithmetic in the third standard; alas! only two boys.

'Deduct 37 from 94.' Prolonged silence, but rapid counting of knuckles and fingers. '37 from 94!' loudly emphasised the teacher, disturbing me in my own anxious calculation, mixed with rapid translation. It was rather a relief when this part of the inspection was over. Fortunately, I have never known them to be good at it.

At last every subject in each standard had been examined, and the result was duly written down in a note-book. The teacher's attention was drawn to the weak points in their knowledge, and admonitions were freely showered all round, not least upon the maternal spectators, on whom largely depends the regularity of the scholars. Indeed, one of them rushed in just then, 'Rusnam! Rusnam! come at once!'

'But what is the matter?' we remonstrated.

'Two of Venkata Swami's goats strayed last night, and have not yet come back. I have been looking for them since morning. Quick! Rusnam, be off, see if they have gone towards Chingapalli!' and one of the scholars was dragged away.

We consulted our watch. 'Nearly ten o'clock. We must go back now. What time will be best for the women to come for sewing?' This to the teacher.

'About eleven,' they say.

'Very well, do not let them be late.' And we departed to the tent, where the disorder of the morning had disappeared and breakfast awaited us.

As the women were expected so soon, we rather hurried over that repast, and then made all ready for their coming. Mats and tent-bags were spread under the tree, and we glanced along the dusty white path for a sign of them. But only herd boys were shouting to their cattle, or gathering in the shade were busy over an exciting game of marbles. Half-past eleven! Twelve! The heat became trying, and the glare made the eyes smart. A messenger was despatched to call the servants. About half-past twelve some figures of women and children emerged from the village and gradually straggled into the tent.

Did you not say you would come at eleven?'

'Yes, is it not eleven o'clock now?'

'No, it is a quarter to one.'

'Oh, well, after you had gone some of us thought we had better cook our rice first. But we did not know it was so late.'

'Well, let us begin now.' And so we began, always in the same way, by a general hand-washing. Then a bale of stout cotton or drill was unrolled, fingered admiringly by each woman.

'This must have come from England?'

'Yes; you would not get that in Royapuram even on market day.'

'I wonder how much it cost the ell?'[1]

But we interrupted these reflections.

'Now, Sarah, which child is to have a garment?

'A skirt for Jivi, please.'

'Come here, Jivi,' and the above-mentioned little six-year-old was measured for a skirt right down to her toes. The child looked absolutely radiant. 'Now, Jivi, mind, when this skirt is sewn you must come to school every day, do you see? and then if you pass at the examination perhaps you will get a jacket.'

The little eyes opened still wider with delight, and the smiling lips extended almost to the ears, otherwise the only response was a shake of the head and the usual grunt, 'H'm!' both signifying assent.

'Here, Sarah, take your stuff, and there is a needle and cotton. That skirt will cost six annas. Now sew where I have tacked, and don't go more than half an inch below it, and don't make stitches big enough to let my finger through.'

Sarah grinned, and received her portion.

'Now, Danamma, it is your turn.'

Mutely the woman addressed pushed forward a big boy.

[1] The ordinary native measure is from the finger to the elbow.

4

'Coat,' she remarked, succinctly.

I laughed. 'You know very well that this sewing-class is intended to make garments for the smaller children who otherwise come to school without any, or next to none. But it has nothing to do with the big boys and girls. You clothed them before we came, and you must go on clothing them after. But you have five younger than this lad; for which one will you sew?'

'Mattai, then,' she grunted, and Mattai was duly measured for a jacket. The teacher's wife helped in the cutting out and tacking, and gradually every individual was provided with material, all properly entered in the note-book, and a copy given to the teacher's wife, with strictest injunctions not to deliver the garment when finished to any one until payment was made. The rate fixed is about half of the cost price of the material, or even less.

How oppressive the air was! It seemed too hot even for the mosquitoes to buzz round. Very busily the women stitched.

'Would you not like thimbles?' But they only laughingly shook their heads. It was difficult enough as it was. But at least they were really at it. What dogged unbelief in their own capacity had to be conquered before they could be persuaded to begin at all! They had laughed us to scorn. 'We learn to sew? Why, we have never done it!' and that was the end, therefore, of that matter, as of

every new matter. Nothing of the Athenian vice about *them!*

'At least come and try!'

'But we cannot.'

'You might learn.'

'No, we couldn't.'

'Why not?'

'We have never done it.'

It was arguing in a circle with a vengeance. 'Will you come to school first thing to-morrow morning?'

'Oh yes, we will come, and then you will see we cannot learn.'

The point was left a moot question, but that it had not been decided ultimately in their favour was shown by that very meeting. They were not grand at it, certainly! And, perhaps, it was hardly to be expected from women accustomed only to field and cattle work. But, at least, they had made a little progress, and what to us was, perhaps, even more important, this class gave us a common ground of womanhood on which to meet, an opportunity to chat on a level, as it were.

'Does it ever occur to you,' we remarked affably, 'to comb your hair?' Nudgings and giggles.

'Missiamma means we are to put cocoa-nut oil on it?'

'I don't mind so much about the oil; but don't you ever comb it?'

'Oh yes! once a week, and certainly on feast days.'[1]

'We do ours every day,' we hinted.

'Ah, yes, you! But what is there in common between you and us? We are like cattle,' came the old pathetic rejoinder.

The sun burnt with such stinging force through the leaves that, in spite of the sun-helmet, we felt it advisable to retire inside the tent.

'This will do for to-day. Fold up the work now, and put it here in the box. You can come again to-morrow, but please a little earlier.' Each bundle, with the name of its owner on it, was laid away, and with many salaams the group broke up and slowly dispersed—children, grown-ups, babies, and all.

The heat was exhausting, and we were thankful for a rest. Only everything was so hot to the touch that the mattress seemed almost unbearable. We were glad when it was time for tea, that panacea for so many ills in India. Afterwards there was a little leisure. Home letters, language study, general reading occupied it in turns. The tent shadow grew a little longer. Slowly over plain and hills and fields descended 'the wistful pause of afternoon.' Some herds of goats were already trailing

[1] It is difficult to find out their actual habits. The writer has sometimes been assured that they attend to their toilet in this matter daily, but beyond their words no other evidence witnessed to the fact!

homewards. The intense glare gave place to a softer light; it was pleasanter to sit outside. Labourers were leaving their work in the fields; it was time, then, for us to go to the village. We collected our books and started. The sun was just sinking below the horizon, the Western sky was aflame, faintly discernible in the glow was the silver sickle of the young moon. A backward glance showed us the camp fire glowing like a point of hope in the gathering gloom behind. Darkness had fallen by the time we reached the 'chapel,' the same as the school-house we visited in the morning. The air in the Mala village was full of smoke and smells and dust and discordant noises.

'Have the men come home?' we asked the teacher.

'Yes, they are just finishing their meal.'

'Will you ring the bell then, please?'

We entered the chapel. The school-children were already squatting in their places in front, smiling and salaaming. The teacher lit the lamp, but as we really must insist on opening the tiny windows, so as to make the stifling atmosphere a trifle less unendurable, a gust of wind soon ends its precarious career. The 'wind-proof' camp lantern was substituted. Alas! that its bright rays should be so attractive to the mosquitoes and other insects!

Gradually some grown-up people dropped in, salaamed and sat down on the mud floor. Some

Shudras also found their way to us, but took great care not to sit in the same place as the despised Malas; they crowded up our end of the room. As most of the people had arrived we started our little service, and selected a lyric. The whole congregation rose, and as they all knew the words by heart joined in the singing most heartily.

Alas for the over-fastidious ear of the European! Every performer in the place started in a key of his or her own, and blithely kept to it. Long ago we gave up the effort of creating harmony out of chaos in these little rural churches; what did it matter? They really sang from their hearts, and surely that was the chief thing. The teacher was in his element, he had a strong voice himself, and added to the curious undulating tune mostly in a minor key, and with intervals unknown to our musical scale, many a nasal twirl and high fantastic twiddle, to which we listen with great respect and admiration, wishing we could do it half so well! Verse after verse was rolled out; there are never too many for them. Indeed, it appears that they are born ritualists; to chant prayers seems more easy and natural to them than to utter them in an ordinary voice. After the hymn a simple prayer was uttered, during which the congregation was reverently prostrated on the ground. Then they rose and looked up expectantly. By the light of the lantern a Scripture passage was read, never a long one, lest

some weary member should fall asleep. Indeed, one or two of the children, not having risen from prayer, their mothers pulled them into a more comfortable attitude, and let them lie on.

The choice of an address is rather a delicate matter. These people, only one degree removed from heathenism, still full of the superstitions of centuries, tainted with inherited evil tendencies, of which we in Christian countries happily know but little, utterly unaccustomed to exert their minds in any save earthly directions, whose capacity for thought has therefore largely degenerated, with characters showing the traces of age-long degradation, with the pressing care for the daily bread occupying the bulk of their consciousness—how could we bring home to them this glorious Gospel that they also are called out of darkness into His marvellous light, how make them understand that not only may they claim fellowship with human beings, but that they may even become partakers of the Divine Nature?

Ah, let us not despair of them! Not while God has not despaired of you and me.

The parables are a wonderful help. The picture of familiar occurrences captivates their attention, they follow with rapt interest, and grunts and shakes of assent, or commiseration, or astonishment, signify their comprehension; and thus gradually, by a flank attack, you glide in upon their daily lives, and show

how aptly it all applies to them. One's heart went out to the upturned eager faces, listening so willingly and gladly after the tiring day's work ; for the time being, at least, readily giving their minds to unworldly matters. Yes, it was possible that there were some very unspiritual thoughts in the backgrounds of their consciousness; but are there never any in ours? And let us not forget that many of these ignorant converts did not come to us by a way which cost them nothing—that it often meant severe persecution, loss of occupation and ostracism, and in all cases leaving behind the old familiar landmarks.

The service was over. Another hymn was sung, and we passed out into the hot, tranquil night. The people went to their huts. Will they remember what they have heard? Our anxious thoughts followed them. How squalid are their hovels, how miserable their lives, and how depressing to every higher thought their everlasting poverty!

Thus we pondered and prayed as we picked our homeward way through the village, rousing the wrath of all its dogs, while the night wind blew softly, and overhead arched the night sky, enfolding in its embrace every one of the children of the Father.

CHAPTER IV

IN MONSOON TIME

IT had been raining for seven days. Not incessantly, but, as if to make up for the pauses, the sky poured forth volumes of water with extra fury whenever it had led one to hope it would clear. And still the clouds hung heavy and black and threatening over the land, and the joy which had shone on many faces when the rain began had changed into doubt, and now into grave anxiety. For the water in the tank[1] just above the town had risen ominously. The level of the overflow—the safety valve of the lake—had been reached long ago; like a miniature Niagara, broad sheets of water rushed in frantic torrents over the edge into the rocky bed below; too narrow, alas! for such rain had not been known for a generation, and the small channel had always been sufficient. But now the immense pressure of water from the tank forced

[1] Artificial lake.

the river over its banks, the surrounding fields were all flooded, and the rice harvest, which should have been gathered in only one more week, was torn away and ruthlessly carried down stream by the pitiless current.

The road to the town led over a bridge, against the massive pillars of which the angry waters swirled and seethed and foamed in vain. Leaning over the parapet stood scores of spectators idly gazing at the scene, conspicuous among them some cultivators who watched the destruction of their anticipated harvest with loud lamentations.

'A week more would have brought me a profit of 300 rupees and the end of debt,' wailed one; 'now I shall have nothing wherewith to pay the Soucar his 100 rupees, and no food for my family; what shall we do?'

Indeed, his was a hard fate, and many more had been similarly afflicted. The unfortunate land, which for years had been suffering from lack of rain, was now distressed by excess of it, working havoc in many ways. Everywhere the railway traffic was disorganised, as the lines were under water in many places, bridges were destroyed or unsafe, and alarming news came from several directions of the breaking down of dykes, the sudden filling and overflowing of *wankas*[1] and consequent flooding of towns and villages.

[1] Stream-beds.

So the general apprehension was by no means groundless; numbers of anxious people walked along the bund banking the tank for two miles on its western shore. A few hours ago, before dawn, the alarming call of the watchman had rung out, quickly bringing the inhabitants together to mend a leakage which threatened disaster, as the town was built immediately below the dyke. The town authorities were there watching the work of repair, and under their eye the coolies toiled silently and quickly to stop the ominous little trickle on the land side of the bund.

Leaving them and the crowd round them, I climbed to its top, broad enough for two country carts to pass each other easily. What a scene it was! I seemed transported to the seaside at home. The cool, damp wind, blowing with such force that it was hard to bear up against it, lashed the water into uneasy tumult; in great waves it burst against the dyke as if a strong tide were flowing in; now angrily tearing and biting, now, in a lull of the wind, softly splashing the sides of the bund with treacherous gentleness, persistently seeking an outlet; and as you stood there you had a disquieting feeling that the ground below your feet was being invisibly undermined.

The town itself looked most desolate, and desperately untidy; for in every street numbers of houses had fallen down. Built of mud bricks and plastered

with mud, which cracked during the hot, dry months and thus easily softened in a steady downpour, the walls would totter and give, and the roof followed suit. So the nights were spent in anxious watchfulness by most of the inhabitants, not daring to lie down in their dwellings, lest the walls should fall and crush them in the night—a fate which had overtaken some unfortunate goats and cattle.

And still the clouds gathered and thickened, the rain came down remorselessly, and found its way even into the 'pukka'-built English houses and offices, which were leaking all over. The sky grew no lighter; everywhere the people prayed to their gods, and goats and buffaloes, slaughtered in sacrifice, floated down the yellow current to propitiate the angry deities.

But in all this tumult of fear and lamentation and desperate prayers, one heart remained unmoved; one heart so broken with despair that no outward calamity could add to her burden. Perhaps, indeed, what was a scourge to others might open a door of release to her.

So thought one childless Brahman woman in the town, the wife of a rich merchant, whose heart was as hard as the nether millstone. Never did this lonely girl, young and pretty as she was, receive a word of kindness from her husband, but plentiful ill-treatment; the marks of his beating on her delicate body were seen by a respectable motherly

woman who told me of it afterwards. His unfaithfulness to her was a matter of public discussion; she had no child to comfort her, what attraction had life to offer? The same maddening round, doing the same things, or, worse, enduring the same things over and over again; no consolation, no compensation —why go on bearing it? The poor girl very probably did not know that the law would have protected her, had she availed herself of it; that under the English raj a woman may leave a husband who illtreats her, and compel him to support her. But even had she known it, it is doubtful whether she would have claimed its help. How should a modest, high-caste woman, uneducated and ignorant of the ways of the world, set about to prove her husband's cruelty in a court of law, especially if he were a man rich enough to buy the evidence and oath of a hundred witnesses against her? And even had she found friends, and made the venture and won her case, well, English law may protect, but Hindu society looks askance at rebellious wives. Her own parents might not receive her, if she refused to live with her husband, and where would any refuge be left her, or any way of remaining respectable? No, there was a swifter, surer way than that. As the waters rose in the tank, and a thousand eyes watched it anxiously, one alone gazed at it in eager hope. Here was escape. Here was rest.

Her husband had gone away on a journey. She

Was it only our fancy that the shadowy and solemn silence of the place was troubled and weighted by haunting suggestions and memories of long ago—old pain and passion and prayer, may be; old sins and shames, old sacrifices and ceremonies? Was it only imagination that felt those neglected forms looking at us from the darkness unreached by the feeble glimmer of our lantern, in brooding wrath at the desecration of their shrine by two women of an alien race and creed?

Perhaps; but it was a suitable prelude, at any rate, to our visit the next evening to the site of the the ancient town, where a huge modern temple attests the vitality of the old faith—in spite of the forsaken shrines which lie in melancholy masses around it—and attracts the devotion of thousands of worshippers yearly. It was in one of the little by-ways leading off from the courtyard of the temple that we began to talk to some of the women who stood outside the group of native houses near. They listened with attention, and our unusual surroundings, instinct with the life and breath of heathenism past and present, lent a deepened earnestness to our words. Some men joined the group after a while, and as soon as they gathered the drift of our words and the meaning of our presence there, they broke into exclamations of fury, and with waving hands and wild gestures drove our audience away from us, and us from them.

We could but leave them; and as we turned sadly away, the sun, which up to that moment had thrown a warm and vivid splendour over the stately ruins and pathetic pomp of a hundred abandoned altars, dropped with a sudden 'sadness of farewell' below the horizon. Then carven columns and arch and stone, and the dim expanse of level landscape beyond, bathed no longer in the subtle glamour of an Eastern sunset, fell from that atmosphere of dream and glow, of poetry and pathos, into one of incommunicable chill, and desertion, and despair. A vast melancholy brooded over the desolate place, and it seemed in some vague way a visualisation of the unfathomable words, 'Without God and without hope.'

We spoke little as we guided our horses over the rough road in the growing gloom.

The next evening we went with our native helpers to Kamalapura, the modern town, somewhat wondering what our reception would be in a place so near to Humpy, with its indignant fever of religious feeling. We were surprised, however, by the largest and most attentive assembly we had ever had in our evangelistic tours. The people gathered in a wide, open space just removed from the town and its noise; as the afternoon faded into evening and the evening into night they still lingered on, and when we would have stopped urged us to continue.

At last the brilliant Eastern moon shone down on the dusky upturned faces of the people who by now

were seated on the ground, and there seemed about us that solemn atmosphere, so rare in an Indian crowd, which leads one involuntarily to prayer. So we told them that we would pray to the God of Whom we had been speaking to them; and a man arose who, in a few impressive words, emphasised the drift of our remarks and urged the people to reverent silence. The latter injunction was unnecessary, for a hush was on us all, and when prayer was over we turned homewards with full hearts. Were there none in that quiet crowd whose hearts were 'athirst for God, for the living God,' and who would recognise with the responsive throb of a seeking spirit the more than human royalty of the figure of the world's Redeemer?

We do not know; but we have never heard of any inquirers at Kamalapura.

We have learnt since then that often the mood that seems like earnest and engrossed attention to our message is easily explicable by other and less satisfactory reasons. Oh, how many times since those early days we have longed for the power to seize and grip these souls; to shake them out of their apathy to the spiritual, out of the smiling and courteous reception of our words that means nothing —less than nothing, out of their profound lack of interest in God and His claims, out of their consummate indifference to moral ideals!

But this is not within our power. Everything

teaches us this. It is only where God has prepared the heart that the message of His redeeming love and holiness is anything but a 'very pleasant song.'

'Oh, could I tell, ye surely would believe it!
Oh, could I only say what I have seen!
How should I tell, or how can ye receive it,
How, till He bringeth you where I have been?'

CHAPTER VI

A CHEQUERED DAY

'I HAVE been to Tirupati and other shrines, and it is all no use,' said Subi, in a discouraged way; 'I have begged and prayed and made vows, but I cannot expect to have a son now. Look at Naraini; she is fourteen or fifteen years old now, and I never had any child after her. No, no! God does not regard me with favour,' and she sighed heavily.

'One can never tell,' replied Radha, 'what prayer can do. Once there was a woman in olden times who, like you, was in great trouble because she had no son. She prayed to God, and He gave her a son, and she dedicated him to God, and the child grew up to be a great teacher and prophet.'

'Who was she?' asked Subi, her interest thoroughly aroused.

'I will read you her story if you like,' suggested Radha. And from the sacred pages the account of

the prayers and tears of the saintly woman long ago comforted the heart of the living.

That evening Subi was very thoughtful and quiet. She was one of the little group of women mentioned in Chapter I. who had given up all idol worship and met regularly with Radha and others to pray together to Christ. That night she resolved to tell Him of her heart's longing, and kneeling down all by herself made known her request to God.

This was the account I heard on one of my visits; and, with a radiant face, Radha added that the answer to this earnest prayer was on the way, and expected to arrive in a few months more. It seemed quite too good to be true. Almost I envied Radha her simple, straightforward faith; not always are we allowed to walk such an unperplexed way, and the answers for many of our prayers still tarry.

Subi was overflowing with gratitude. She had prayed to Jesus, and He had heard her. This child should be given to Him, and if it really were a boy he should be called Samuel, like the pure-hearted child of the mother of old.

'Naraini has a little brother,' was Radha's first greeting as I arrived late at night a few months after. This was joyful news, and the fatigue of the long journey across country was all forgotten. Next morning early I visited the home. The baby

lay in the sunshine lustily kicking—a strong, bonny boy—laughing with glee when the strange white missiamma took him up, and clutching unabashedly at her face. The neighbours stood round gaping and laughing and admonishing the baby to be on his best behaviour. The mother bent over him.

'Samuel, Samuel!' she called with pride, and the babe wriggled with joy.

'Have you really called him Samuel?' I asked.

'Yes, indeed, we have. Everybody laughed at us, and all our caste people said, "Whoever heard of such a name?" But I told them it meant that I had asked him of God, and I do not care if they laugh. Oh, my little Samuel!' and she snatched the child up and hugged him to her breast. 'I asked Jesus, and He has given you to me, my joy, my little pride, my real own little Samuel.'

'You know what she intends to do with him?' asked Radha.

'What?'

'When he is five years old she wants you to have him altogether; to educate him and teach him to grow up into a real little disciple of Jesus. She says that even if they are never baptized,' and a shadow rested on the speaker's face for a moment, 'because they fear their caste people, that the boy shall be. His father, too, is willing.'

The glorious sunshine on the hills around seemed fitly to express the feelings in my heart that morning.

Even in the thick darkness of heathenism we are not always in the shadow. Sometimes there are sunny glimpses of the progress of the Kingdom. That day I had one. How far has this ignorant woman advanced from the 'vain repetitions' of the Gentiles, and what true courage she evinced in naming the child as she did in the face of opposition and ridicule! The neighbours gathered round, and many knelt reverently when we again dedicated the little Samuel in prayer. May this child of many prayers follow in the steps of his ancient namesake!

Let it not be thought that such encouraging glimpses occur very often. Light and shadow are very near together here. That same evening in the gloaming I went for a walk. I was staying at the time in the schoolhouse in the noisy bazar street, for a swollen river prevented me from crossing over to the rest-house. All day long there had been a constant stream of visitors, and when the sun went down I left my somewhat public abode to go out and get a little quiet.

But I had not gone far along the fields when I met some women who accosted me. When had I come? Where was I staying? And so forth.

After satisfying them on these points I returned their inquiries. Where had they been? For it was evident they were not returning from field-work.

'Oh,' they said gaily, 'at Kottapalli.'

I glanced at their festive garments. 'You have been to worship Mastan Sahib?'

'Yes, yes, we have,' they admitted laughingly.

'Is he not ill and weak now?' I inquired. 'I hear he is dying.'

'Yes; he is getting old,' they allowed.

'Some time your Swami must die,' I said, 'and what will you do then?'

'Did not Jesus Christ die?' they retorted.

I was taken aback by the glib mention of His name.

'Yes, He died, truly,' I answered. Then, with a mighty rush, the glory of the Christian hope flooded my soul. 'He died, and He rose again from the dead. But how do you know about Him?'

'You come and tell us of Him now,' they urged.

'Come and sit down here, out of the way of the cattle.'

They pulled me on a little platform built round a tree trunk, and there we squatted down, four or five of us.

'Tell us how He was born,' they asked.

Wondering at their questions and their persistence—for it is not often an audience seeks you out, and commands you to speak while they sit still and ask apt questions—I began, and tried to

MASTAN SAHIB.

paint before them the marvel of the Incarnation. There had been something covertly mocking and irreverent in their manner at first; but no notice was taken of this, and as the simple, yet so wonderful, Story proceeded they seemed to grow very quiet and subdued; and it was at last not they but I who perceived that darkness had fallen, and suggested it was time for all of us to be getting back to the town. So we went homewards together, and, having inquired their names, we separated when we had reached the lane leading to Radha's house.

There was something puzzling about the occurrence, the knowledge of Gospel facts, the willingness to hear; yet a strange lack of simplicity in these women perplexed me. I wondered if Radha could explain it.

She could. She knew them well. Years ago, when the knowledge of Christ had first come to the town, through a Hindu who had bought a Bible and read it to his neighbours, they had been among the inquirers in a movement which, among others, produced one of my most valued Biblewomen. For a time it had seemed they were prepared to follow Christ boldly, though they still hesitated at the first step of baptism. Then the tempter came to them through the fatal advice of some relatives.

'If you serve Jesus Christ,' the plausible voice said, 'you will spoil your caste, and will be worse than

low caste. If you want to be religious, why not serve Mastan Sahib? He is a very holy Swami, and if you become his disciples you will keep your caste.'

It was possible, then, to make the best of both worlds. They decided on this evidently so much more profitable course.

'They will never leave Mastan Sahib now,' concluded Radha sadly.

It threw a new and discouraging light on the Hindu mind, to realise that hearts which had been really influenced by Christianity, and attracted towards its central Figure to the extent of seriously considering the possibility of baptism, could ever regard Christ and Mastan Sahib as alternative masters, or put them sufficiently on a level to compare allegiance to one with homage to the other. Is their spiritual sense so hopelessly astray as that?

Though we are loth to ridicule any one who is an object of sincere worship, we must confess that he is one of the dirtiest and most repulsive beings it has ever been our lot to meet. Mastan Sahib, the famous saint of Kottapalli, had taken upon himself the vow of perpetual silence; apparently also one to abstain from any kind of ablution during the rest of his life. His matted and filthy hair hangs over his shoulders, his nails, which are never cut, are like bird's claws; his one garment, which

before a Government concerned for decency obliged him to wear it, was conspicuous by its absence, had apparently never made the acquaintance of the *dhobi*[1] since he first put it on. Few sights in India have been to me more revolting than to see him the centre of a crowd of admiring women worshippers, some of whom are stroking his legs and dandling his feet, hanging garlands round his neck, or poking portions of food into his half-closed lips; while some, I am told, even go the length of drinking the water with which they have just washed his feet. This worship, in the lives of these women, proved the successful rival of the spiritual service of the Saviour of sinners. No wonder that our hearts sink, as we realise what it meant that hearts which had been contemplating 'the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ' could enthrone such an one on their inner altar and find in him a life-long satisfaction.

Yet that day did not close wholly in darkness. In Radha's tiny room a little group had assembled: her sister, mentioned before; the school-teacher, a thoughtful man who had found the way to the Light only a few years ago through careful study of the New Testament; and, fourthly, a young man of the Shudra caste whom Radha had long been teaching, and whose gentle and earnest spirit seemed to be the good ground, for some evidence of which the missionary's heart longs so often in vain. His

[1] Washerman.

mother was another of the little band of praying women; his sister, as well as himself, had learnt to read the New Testament fluently, and in the home a spirit of earnestness and faith prevailed; but he alone, of all the members of the family, was ready to break through the fetters of caste and receive baptism.[1]

It was one of those hours not easily forgotten. We five sat on the floor round the low stand supporting the little earthen lamp, which gave just enough light to decipher the words in the Book lying before us. Radha's bed was tilted up against the wall to give us more room. Unheeded in the corner stood the chatty containing the rice for her and her sister's evening meal, on ashes rapidly growing cold. Moths and flies buzzed near us every now and then. Samadhanam poked the wick burning low into a brighter flare, to light the pages over which we were bending; Radha, in her eager way, alert and ready to absorb new spiritual food, would ask, 'Where is that? Let me note the place,' if a verse or its connection were not quite familiar to her; while the new convert sat by with a face quietly glad, venturing now and then to add his own ideas, or to tell of his first timid attempts to witness for his Lord in villages in the neighbourhood, adding radiantly, 'I did not think I could tell them,

[1] Since the above was written his baptism has taken place.

I was afraid, but the Lord gave me a mouth. Oh, He gave me a mouth to speak for Him!' Our hearts opened freely to one another; it seemed an hour which taught me a little more realisation of the deep blessedness of the words, 'I believe in the Communion of Saints.'

I looked round at the peaceful, shining faces in that dimly-lit room, and reflected that less than a dozen years ago not one of these four had heard of the Kingdom. It made one glad to be a missionary.

Before we parted we poured out our hearts in prayer, each of us. There was much need! We were all united in longing that Tippana's whole family—already disciples in heart—might have the courage to confess their faith before men. But when I had spoken of it to his mother she had only answered pathetically, 'I am afraid! I am afraid!' And little wonder. Though they are not people of the highest caste, but belong to the ordinary, respectable middle classes, yet even with these how tremendous is the force of caste, and how invincible seem its chains to those bound by them!

So we prayed, while the shadows outside deepened into night. It was late before our little circle broke up, and I went back to my school through the now quiet and dark bazar street, cheered beyond words by some of the events of the day. And 'beyond words' is not an extravagant expression.

CHAPTER VII

AN 'AT HOME'

WE were sitting in the verandah of our mission bungalow and straining our eyes along the broad, white path between the margosa trees that led to the gate, hoping to catch sight of our expected visitors. But only the familiar, half-naked figure of the waterman could be seen, as he leisurely marched to the well, leisurely fixed the neck of the pot in the sling of the rope and let it descend into the cool, dark depths below, leisurely pulled it up, and most leisurely of all lifted it on to his shoulder and dawdled away to the newly-planted young trees which were to make a garden of our arid wilderness.

It was the first time we had made the experiment of inviting some high-caste Hindu women to the mission house, and naturally we were rather anxious over it. Would they come? It was now half-past three o'clock, and we had asked them for three. Not that we expected them to know our European

time exactly! Thinking they might very likely be early, *we* were ready for them at half-past two. The dining-table had been moved to create a clear space; rugs were spread in the verandah; photographs and pictures likely to interest them had been laid about; and now we were waiting. They gave us plenty of time to discuss what we should do with them when they turned up. On this subject we had received definite instructions from the Taluk Sheristadar, an enlightened man, very willing to promote social intercourse between Hindus and Europeans. It was his wife who was to collect all the others and chaperone them in this novel undertaking.

'As to Monday,' he had written in a note on the matter, 'I wish all success to the gathering. Tell the women about English houses and their inner arrangements and how many storeys they have; also about the ships in which you come to India and the expense of the voyage; also about the underground railway and omnibuses; and if you have a microscope, or pictures of scenery, or a musical instrument, show these to them; these things interest them very much. But Hindu females being very conservative, I would suggest that religious topics had best be left alone.'

Evidently a visit to the mission bungalow was regarded with some misgivings; and as it is still the day of small things with us as regards work among

the higher castes, we were quite resolved to follow his advice in so far as to say nothing which could hurt or alarm our guests, and make them secretly determine never to repeat the visit, or to find it inconvenient to see us when next we called on them.

But it seemed as if they were not going to give us the chance of carrying out our good intentions, for the afternoon was wearing on and there was no sign of them.

'It is always so,' remarked my friend, one of the few Englishwomen in India, outside the mission circle, who take a warm and affectionate interest in its people. 'This has happened to me more than once. I remember one evening in Peddakota I had prepared a magic lantern for them, and they had promised to come, and then not one turned up. Some trifling obstacle; and they had calmly thought another day would do as well. I daresay now they cannot get bandies or something of that sort; and, of course, they don't realise that here we sit waiting and wasting our time.'

'But you can always get bandies in the town here,' I said discontentedly, 'so that cannot be the reason. And *ekadashi*[1] was only on Saturday; they cannot have another fast day already. Besides, they

[1] eka=one, das=ten, *i.e.* eleven. Ekadashi is the name for the eleventh day after new moon, and after the full moon, and is kept in orthodox Brahman houses as a special fast day when the women would not pay any visits.

themselves said Monday would suit them very well.'

'But I do not give them up yet,' my friend consoled me, womanlike, after having reduced me to the depths of despair. 'After all, it is only just after four o'clock now. An hour late, that is nothing. What is time to them?'

At that moment my ears caught the sound of distant wheels. 'There they are, I believe!' I exclaimed excitedly, and we both peered down the path to the blinding white gate pillars. Yes, there they were, one, two, three bandies, rounding the bend by the margosa trees. We joyfully ran down the verandah steps to receive our visitors.

What a brilliant assembly alighted from the carts! Women in shining silk *saris*—red, blue, green, magenta—with magnificent gold borders, or gold spangled all over; white jessamine flowers in their hair; and jewels sparkling everywhere—in their ears, in their noses, in their hair, round their necks, round their arms, round their wrists, round their waists, round their ankles, on their fingers, on their toes—a subtle glittering glamour seemed suddenly abroad in our quiet mission compound, grey in the cloudy monsoon weather, with but fitful gleams of sunshine.

By the time the last were unloaded the first comers were already in the dining-room, with endless enjoyment satisfying to the full their curiosity about an English house.

'What a lot of things, what a lot of things!' was the ever-repeated remark of astonishment. And when we thought of their houses, absolutely bare save for some mats on the floor, a string cot, a box in which to keep clothes and jewels, a few brass pots and earthen vessels in the kitchen, and perhaps a table and a chair in houses where the lord and master is accustomed to do office work, we did not wonder that even the simple inner outfit of a mission bungalow amazed them.

We need have given ourselves no scruples about their entertainment, or topics of conversation with them! They entertained themselves. Some framed Swiss photographs were hanging on the wall, and I began to tell them something of that country and its snowy glory; but they did not care for explanations; like children they were impatient to look at the next thing. So we laughingly gave it up, and said they could go over the whole house and look at whatever they liked.

Presently I found a number of them in my bedroom. Again the astonished exclamation, 'What a lot of things!' Yes, indeed, what a lot! A bed, properly on its four feet, not, as theirs usually are in the day time, standing upon its hind legs against the wall; the bedding not rolled away and put in a corner, but spread on in its place; a chest of drawers, a cupboard, a washing-stand ('Oh, how convenient!' they exclaimed when they

saw the basin with water, soap, towel, all ready to hand; 'what a lot of merit you white people must have to get your things like that without any trouble!'); and last, not least, the greatest fascination of all, a dressing-table. They fingered every article on it, and I nervously thought of my hairbrush. Would they guess what it was made of? Bristles, bristles from a dead animal! Such defilement would be enough to send them from the house in indignation.

But, fortunately, there was a greater attraction there than anything else in the whole bungalow—the looking-glass. Only an ordinary toilet-glass, but how it enchanted them! They all came and prinked before it in turn; here was luxury indeed! I wondered did they think European ladies inordinately vain, to have glasses ten times as large as their tiny hand mirrors, small enough to be easily held in the palm without the aid of fingers? If they thought so they courteously kept it to themselves. But the mere fact of a bedroom impressed them.

'Who sleeps here?' they asked repeatedly.

'I do,' I answered.

'And no one else?'

'No, nobody else.'

'But is this room only for sleeping in?' they persisted.

'Well, yes, mostly. You see we eat in that room,

and that is my writing-table in the corner of the dining-room, where I work during the day. To this room I come when I want to rest.'

Truly wonderful it seemed to them. And then I awoke afresh to the fact of their *not* having any bedrooms. So, of course, this idea of solitude astonished them very much. In their houses such a thing is unheard of. They sleep anywhere where it is convenient, or cool, or warm, according to the season. As the night falls each member of the household spreads his or her mat where they like, and lie down in the clothes worn during the day. Privacy is superfluous. It gave me an inward shudder to realise this. Just imagine living always in a crowd, day and night. For with the joint family system that prevails in India there is often quite a crowd under one roof. Or, if not a crowd, it means, at least, that such women as there are in a household are hardly ever alone.

Watching the chattering women in my room I realised afresh, and with pain, the tremendous difference between them and us, indicated by just this one thing, they never feel the necessity of being alone. Their very prayers are said in a crowd. The soul, that counts for so much in Hinduism, theoretically, is allowed no chance to develop freely and to grow strong—amongst the women. The relief that so constantly comes to us when at the close of the day we can shut our door

and feel alone, ready and willing to have the sense of selfhood—so necessary to a vigorous inner life—steal upon us, never comes to them. And, what is so hopeless, they do not feel the need of it. If they did, ah, that is just it, *if* they did! It will probably need centuries of education of various kinds before they do.

But such reflections were not troubling our guests, who were peering out of the window.

'What is that house over there?' they asked.

'It is our church,' I answered. 'Would you like to see it?'

'Oh yes! Come, let us all go,' they chorussed.

But on the way a doubt arose. Some turned to the Brahman women among them and asked hesitatingly—

'Do you think it is right for us to go and see their god?'

'There is no god there,' I hastened to explain. 'That building is only the place where we meet to worship God, and learn more about Him by reading our holy Book.'

Thus reassured they followed me inside. But almost immediately I heard a whisper behind me.

'There, don't you see it? That is the god.'

Quickly I followed the direction of their alarmed glance. Yes, no doubt, there it was, reared up on the little platform, with its solid square base, its slender middle shooting up to support the broad

slanting top, quite a formidable idol—our innocent reading-desk! I mounted the little platform and illustrated its uses. Fortunately the Bible was lying on it, and as I drew it forward and exhibited it to their gaze, I saw from their relieved faces that they really believed me.

'Read something from the Book and teach us,' came a request from an elderly woman in whose house I had often been and always found ready listeners. But the Sheristadar's warning flashed into my mind. Some of the women I had never seen before, notably some of the Brahmans who had been brought by their friend, the Sheristadar's wife. Would it be the best way to open a door for the Gospel, to alarm them at the outset, and thus shut their houses to us?

'We will sing you something,' I temporised, and, calling in the catechist's wife, we sang to them a simple hymn of praise.

'Now will one of you sing to us?' we asked.

'That young woman there can sing,' they assented, pointing to one of their number. But the damsel was seized with a fit of shyness and hung her head. To give her time to recover composure we dropped into conversation.

How strange that gay assembly looked in our little church! Never had these walls gazed upon such a splendid brilliance of colours. I sat down by the Brahman lady who was a stranger to me,

a marvellously stout woman, in a check cloth of old gold and black. She talked very affably.

'Some English ladies,' she remarked, 'are followers of our gods. Now do you, too, believe in our gods, or do you believe in yours?'

She certainly had taken no alarm as yet, but it was time to declare myself.

'I am a Christian,' I explained, 'I believe the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of the world.'

'Ah yes,' she answered courteously, but vaguely; for it did not really interest her much what creed I professed, 'many rivers flow to the sea.'

The instincts of hospitality would have prompted a friendly cup of tea at this juncture; alas, that it was impossible to gratify them! But I bethought myself of the contents of a box sent out to us by a friend and helper at home, and after a few minutes returned with a bundle from which each guest received a small cake of scented soap, which they accepted with alacrity. The little ones, who had come with their mothers, were not forgotten, and were soon busy exhibiting some toys to each other in great glee.

Meanwhile my Brahman friend regarded me with a puzzled look. She had evidently been meditating on my position, wondering, perhaps, if I were high caste enough to keep secluded; for presently she asked me—

'Do you ever go out?'

'Yes, pretty often,' I replied gravely.

'Then would you come to my house?' she went on eagerly. 'I should be so glad.'

I tried not to look as pleased as I felt. 'Yes, certainly, I will come. Where is your house?'

'Near the Reading Room. Do you know his name?'

His being, of course, her husband's, which she as his wife would never pronounce, though her little daughter might say her father's name quite glibly; but, in her turn, would never mention the name of the boy to whom she was betrothed.

'Yes, I know it,' I assured her. 'Krishna Murti Rao, clerk in the Kutcherry. I will come as soon as I can.'

I felt very thankful, for I knew theirs to be one of the most orthodox and bigoted households in the town, and it seemed much to me to have received this invitation. Our station is a small provincial one, far behind the times. In it things are not as they are in some large cities where work, both educational and evangelistic, has been done for many years, and where visits by European ladies are not only tolerated but welcomed in many high-caste houses, though they come avowedly to talk of religion.

In our little town, if we would gain an entrance into these homes at all, we must be content to go to work gently. And even when we are inside, the way to speak freely of the things we long to communicate to them opens but slowly, and to force the pace were

only to block the path effectually. It is natural that these high-caste women, who, though not strictly *purdah*, yet rarely go out, should be utterly astonished at us, our different appearance, our different ways. We must give them time to get over their wonder, though they do not get over it in a few minutes. It is also supremely natural that they should be full of curiosity as regards all things foreign. So, of course, they want to ask us many questions. Until that curiosity is in some measure satisfied it would hardly be profitable to force a religious topic. And again, it is natural to them to have their minds set on trifles, on the things of the ordinary daily life. Are we invariably so superior to them in this? To expect them, while in this state, readily to listen to and absorb a spiritual truth, is to expect them to perform a mental and moral feat of which we ourselves are not always capable. For is it not too often true of most of us, that 'the world is too much with us?'

Of course, we know it is possible to the Lord Jesus Christ 'with a look and in a day' to work the supreme miracle. But to receive this life the heart must be prepared, above all, by a sense of sin. Now here in India the exceeding great majority of hearts are not so prepared. The only opening still left to us is to approach them sympathetically, in a natural human way, one woman meeting another, answering their questions, returning them even, speaking on topics they care about, before we expect them to

listen to subjects which, however vital, do not yet attract them; letting them feel that their ordinary human lives are genuinely interesting to us, and waiting for, not forcing, an opportunity to convince them that their souls interest us even more.

It is a slow way. But often it seems to me that our great failing in the mission field is that we are in too much of a hurry. Indian jugglers make a tree grow from a seed in a few minutes. That is, no doubt, a delightful performance. To sow a seed and wait for it to spring, nay, even wait for a convenient season to sow, is very trying. Yet even for the bread that perisheth every season is not seed time.

Our visitors were departing. Chattering and laughing they stood round the bandies while the oxen were being yoked, a process for which 'harnessed' would be far too elaborate a description. One by one the children were lifted in, and the grown-ups scrambled in gradually. I had never realised the seating capacity of these bandies before.

The leave-takings were endless, and the protestations many that they would like to come again. Will they? At last the carts creaked slowly away, and we turned thoughtfully into the house. Had we come one step nearer our ultimate object?

CHAPTER VIII

ONE OF MANY

IT was the hour immediately following the dawn—one of the loveliest in the Indian as well as the English day—and a faint mist, suggestive of purity and coolness and some subtle but intimate spiritual memory, lingered about the distant slopes of the Ramandrug range, and clung to the still, shadow-haunted valleys at their base.

The vision was alluring, but it was not for us that day, and we turned our steps towards one of the many little villages within a mile or two of Kotturu, which was our home for the time.

Our audience was not a large one that morning, as many of the village folk were away cutting the sugar harvest and grinding the cane in the primitive mills; but it was an attentive and—at least to us—an inspiring one.

As the little crowd gathered round us and listened with serious courtesy to our very deficient attempts in the vernacular—for this was in our first year—we

noticed one woman, neither young nor handsome, but with a sharp and cruel anxiety written upon her features, gazing at us most earnestly, and putting both hands to her forehead in the attitude of a very deferential salaam, constantly bowing in our direction.

After the service was over and the last lyric sung, she hastened up to us and begged us to come into her house and give medicine to her son, who was ill. We were accustomed to these requests, as the few simple drugs with whose action we were acquainted had cured many a fever and other distressing little ailments amongst our own people, whose faith in our power of healing was much greater than our own, and seemed infectious. So we entered the house, and when our eyes, aching with the glare of the Indian sunshine, became accustomed to the darkness of the low room, saw a lad of about nine years stretched unconscious and rigid upon a pallet.

We saw at a glance that this was no case for our amateur efforts, and advised her to take the little lad forthwith to the hospital, which was not far away. This, however, she refused to do, evidently feeling the deep distrust of complete ignorance with regard to the mysterious operations of the Government hospital; and it was not until we had spent much time and energy in persuasion that she at last hung the dearly loved but unconscious burden over her shoulder and set out with us for the hospital. By then the sun was fairly high, and seemed to blaze

down with peculiarly unsympathetic splendour upon our little procession—for some of her friends accompanied her part of the way—as we slowly wound along the dusty white road towards the town.

As we drew near, something in the limp way those poor little limbs hung excited my apprehension, and I raised the cloth that partly covered them. A dread crossed our hearts, as we looked beneath, that death had been already busy there; but thinking it wiser to await the doctor's verdict, as we were within a few yards of the town, we said nothing, but walked on in silence with sinking hearts.

Arrived at the hospital, the weary but hopeful mother sat down on the verandah steps, and shifted her burden tenderly on to her lap with a look of most yearning and absorbed affection at the pitifully unresponsive figure. Ah, shall I ever forget that moment, with its sense of irrevocable tragedy and the wild wish to keep that poor mother's heart ignorant a little longer of the inexorable fact!

Our hearts almost stood still as the native doctor came up. Would he give, after all, a gleam of hope? Alas! there was none, and a shriek of despairing anguish rent the air as the unsuspicious and eager eyes read the truth in the doctor's face even before he had spoken.

Throwing herself on the ground beside her dead son she gave terrible vent to her uncontrollable grief. Meanwhile the compound was filling with

a little crowd of people who stared at her in what seemed to us a somewhat aloof and unsympathetic way.

At last she rose with an air of despairing and petrified calm, and, turning a deaf ear to our deep but brokenly-expressed sympathy, began to make arrangements to carry her beloved burden back to the home she had so lately left, bereft of any hope wherewith to lighten it.

But in vain she looked for any practical sympathy from the crowd of bystanders; not one amongst them would lift a finger to help her, not one of the many bullock-drivers would even hire his rough cart to this mother, whose heart a sword had pierced, to carry her dead home. The commonest human pity was strangled by the inflexible religious rules which pronounced contact with a corpse defilement.

And while we with sick hearts and indignant sympathy were vainly beating at the adamantine wall of Hindu customs, she rose, and with strange and uncomplaining dignity and submission, lifted her pathetic burden and passed swiftly out through the now silent crowd.

A few moments we watched her figure silhouetted in the white blaze of the pitiless sunshine, and then she was gone; gone with her great grief and her hopeless heart into the darkness of her emptied home.

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A MARKET IN THE PLAINS.

CHAPTER IX

A SEEKER

THE last stragglers from market were going home. Buyers and sellers had packed up their wares, carts were rumbling away, the *maidan*,[1] where all through the hot midday busy bartering of manifold goods had been going on, looked now untidy and forsaken. The setting sun converted the *tank*[2] into 'a sea of glass, as it were, mingled with fire'; sharply outlined against the evening sky the curiously black-crested hills loomed silently above, and from the rice fields below the bank arose the croaking of innumerable frogs.

The streets of the little country town were teeming with life. Women talking at the doors over their purchases, or hurriedly setting out for the well with their water-pots, while some children were proudly exhibiting to envious little playfellows the gay-coloured new bangles which had been painfully squeezed over their hands by the vendor that day.

[1] Plain. [2] Artificial lake.

Market-goers were returning with their bundles and baskets, pushing their way in the streets through the thronging herds of lowing cattle driven in from pasture, and each seeking now its own door. Through the open doors issued the smoke of many fires where family suppers were in preparation; and this, mingling with the dust in the rear of the goat and cattle herds, and with the atoms of pepper and chillies blown away from the booths where they were for sale, or the kitchens where they were in use, as well as with the unmistakable traces in the air of much perspiring and unwashed humanity—not to speak of the close vicinity of many manure heaps, and the general most insanitary conditions of an Indian town—produced an indescribably choking and unsavoury atmosphere. The human sounds most in evidence—disputes at the street corners, haggling at the shops, angry quarrelling over unsatisfactory bargains, floating fragments of conversation on the everlasting subject of the rupee—matched the smells, alas! and not the sunset.

But up a little side street, not really far from the clamour and the bustle, although the atmosphere was so different that it seemed miles away, a scene was going on which did match the sunset.

A little group of men and women had assembled there and, with their dusky faces bent in supplication, were lifting their hearts to the Unseen. A burning wick in its saucer of oil had been placed

in a niche in the mud wall, and by its dim and flickering rays one woman was reading aloud—reading an old, old Story, but one here so new to nearly all, and so eagerly listened to.

Poor coolie women they were mostly, one or two of them had brought their husbands; each had worked hard all day, and now they were tired and hungry; but, ignorant as they were, they had grasped something of the fact that man does not live by bread alone, and they had come together here to learn and listen and to pray.

Watch them now, after the reading and a short explanation are over, their prostrate forms on the ground, one after another audibly and intelligently lifting their voices in earnest prayer. As you catch the nature of their petitions—'Grant, O Lord, that we may walk every day as Thy children. Wash our hearts from sin through Christ, and make us fit for heaven'—it may well be that your heart is stirred within you.

Who are they? Christians? No, ignorant heathen women, innocent of any kind of education, poor; earning their daily bread by their daily toil; but amongst them has lived for some time a Christian woman, whose heart is on fire with the love of Christ.

'Come, now, and pray with me,' she began to say at sundown to one and another. And they came, perhaps from curiosity at first, and sometimes

staying away again when they had already climbed some steps in the upward journey; one had come long enough to learn to read the New Testament fluently herself, and then went back; but, undismayed, that faithful, enthusiastic heart held on and called others, and some are learning now to read, and more have learned to pray. Often on moonlit nights you might see them sitting together far into the night, praying and singing, ever stimulated by this one woman's untiring spirit, keeping themselves, according to their measure, in the love of God.

'Radha,' I said, deeply moved, as we went home together in the dark after such a service, 'tell me the whole way God has led you yourself.'

'Ah' she replied, 'that is a long story. I will come and tell it you to-morrow at midday, when we have plenty of time.'

So she came; and I tell her experience very much as I heard it from her own lips, for little need is there for adornment.

A little village in the Cuddapah district was her birthplace, one far away in a hilly country where, to her knowledge, no white visitors had ever come. There were four children in the family, two boys and two girls; but her two little brothers died in infancy. The Baljis[1] were her caste people,

[1] The name of a Shudra caste among the Kanarese and Telugu peoples.

respected peasants mostly, having often a little land and some cattle of their own. According to her people's custom, she was betrothed at five years of age to her mother's younger brother, and the union was considered most suitable, especially as her future husband possessed a fair share of the family land. But it turned out less fortunate. Before she had reached even the tender age which, according to Hindu ideas, authorises the guardians of a girl to allow her to undertake the duties of wifehood and motherhood, the bridegroom-elect died. It may be that this crushing blow increased the serious tendency of her young mind; but even before it had fallen she had begun to put forth feelers after the Unseen.

'Mother,' said the thoughtful little girl one day, when hardly eleven years old, 'tell me some way to heaven.'

'Learn this hymn to Krishna,' replied the mother. 'Pray it often, my child, and you will obtain salvation.' And the little one diligently learnt and sang:—

'In childhood I joined my fellows in play, and forgot thee,
O Krishna!
In manhood, in the pleasures of marriage, I forgot thee,
O Krishna!
In age, when my body is wasting, and I cannot rise from
my couch, I forgot thee, O Krishna!
Now tell, where neither wife, nor sister, nor brother will
be with me, what I must experience.

There sinners are tied to a pillar and burnt with fire,
O Krishna!
The heavenly city let me find, O Rama Krishna!'

It seems a strange hymn to have taught a child. But it was the only one the mother knew. The little daughter, however, would not stop there, but learnt many more. She knew much of the Ramayanam by heart, as well as other poetry, the Sitakalyānam, the Urimellavēram, the Kābādjavākyam, and others. But a strange sense of their insufficiency seems to have been with her from very early years. The more prayers she learnt the more her heart craved a deeper satisfaction. Some years passed, and as she grew up to take her part in the ordinary household duties, her mental and spiritual attitude became more and more that of a seeker.

'Oh, that I knew how I might find Him!' might be written over many years of her life. As soon as she was old enough to undertake the fatigue of the journey she went on the first of her many pilgrimages.

Five or six days' march from her home was a famous shrine on a hill, Pushpa Yiri Chandrayurdu. The legend ran that the burnt bones of Brahmans turned there into flowers, hence its name, 'Cupid of the Flowery Hill.' A river flowed round its base, and here the devout bathed to wash away their sins. Among the hundreds who were attracted to

(I. AND III.) THE DEVOUT BATHING.
(II.) DEVOTEES MEASURING THEIR LENGTH AROUND A TEMPLE.

this sacred spot came one day this girl widow. From relations and friends she had begged help till, little by little, she had scraped together the sum of six rupees, which she trusted would be a sufficiently worthy offering to the flower god. With the thronging multitude she also went to bathe, and in reverential awe entered the temple. Before the door of the inner shrine sat a priest keenly scrutinising the offerings. No gifts under a rupee could procure the permission to wave the *mangala hariti* before the idol, a mixture of camphor and cocoanut, which is lit and burnt at the shrine. Some had come from mere curiosity, they would pay an anna and pass inside just for a look, unaccompanied by an offering or a blessing, and carelessly pass out again into the glare and the sunshine and general merrymaking and holiday. But to most it was a more serious business.

Radha's offering of six rupees procured her a goodly portion to burn in the *mangala hariti*, and the assurance of much divine favour. Thus encouraged and gladdened she came home, having acquired a new dignity in the eyes of the neighbours by this meritorious act of pilgrimage. But her peace was unduly disturbed.

'Did you see the god?' asked a poor washer-woman, mockingly, one evening.

'Should I have gone so far and not seen him?' she answered. 'I saw him with my eyes.'

'You are sure you saw him?' taunted the other one. 'You did not see a god. You saw a stone.'

Poor Radha had no answer. The sting of doubt and unrest had entered her heart.

'Oh! you should go to Tirupati,' advised some one. 'Thousands flock there. Venkateshwara there is a mighty god.'

Hope sprang up anew. The process of carefully hoarding every least coin was recommenced, until six rupees were again collected. The sale of some family jewels hastened the longed-for moment when she could set out a second time.

'Perhaps I ought to have made a vow last time,' she reflected. 'Maybe the god will be propitiated if I devote my hair at his shrine.'[1]

This resolution was carried out immediately on arrival at Tirupati. She submitted herself to the hands of the barber, and during the process of shaving her head a priest would repeat the usual formula of purification for her: —

> 'Sins as huge as Mounts Menn or Mandara,
> Sins of various kinds,
> These sins adhere to the hair of the head,
> For these sins I undergo this shaving.'

Then the hair was offered to the deity and thrown

[1] Unlike the Brahmans and many Shudra castes, the Baljis do not, as a rule, oblige their widows to shave the head at the death of the husband. Vow is a common mode of procedure, specially among widows.

into the sacred tank, and the earnest pilgrim herself bathed and worshipped and laid down her offering at the shrine. It was all she had, but her eager soul was not satisfied. There still remained a thick silver bracelet on her arm, undisturbed there for years; this she forced off, and hammering it with a stone broke it in half. One half she added to her offering, the other half was sold, but the proceeds were not sufficient to enable her to dispense with wayside charity on her homeward journey.

But she could not rest long at home. Tirupati, with its many temples and gay crowds of pilgrims, with its far-famed shrine and sacred waters, had not worked a cure for her. Her unquenched thirst soon drove her forth again.

This time she bent her steps to a holy river, the Rasverudu River. The usual ceremonies were performed: her offering this time consisted in but a single rupee; her resources were getting straitened. But she returned home with the old sadness in her heart; she had not found in the Rasverudu River that 'open Fountain for sin and for uncleanness' for which her soul longed.

For a time now family bereavements kept other thoughts in the background. Both her parents died, one shortly after the other. Her sister had married and lived in the hut adjoining hers; as they owned some land and cattle, the family could make a modest livelihood. Then the brother-in-law died also, and

the two widowed sisters had only each other left. They tended their few cows and buffaloes, hired labourers tilled their fields, and, according to their people's notions, the two lonely women might have lived in their village fairly comfortably. But her soul was still bent on the old quest :—

'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks,
So panteth my soul after Thee, O God.
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:
When shall I come and appear before God?'

She did not know these words then; but that passionate cry of old had found an echo in her heart, though she hardly realised herself Whom she was seeking.

Kadiri was her next goal; Kadiri with its many temples and bigoted priests; pretty Kadiri surrounded by grandly picturesque hills, almost Swiss in their jagged contours; but it was not natural beauty of which she was in search. Thousands are attracted there to the great yearly festival, which lasts eight days; the *tamashas* are endless, and the temples reap a great harvest. Perhaps there were more seeking hearts that year in that gay multitude, to the outward observer presenting so little of the idea of souls repentant and athirst for God—who knows? At least we know now there was one. Flowers and money were offered, and camphor burnt at the shrines; her head was shaved a second time in

propitiation of sins; hymns were sung and prayers repeated, and with the satisfaction that she had done all she could, at least as far as she knew, the solitary seeker turned homewards to the little mountain village.

Some months of quiet life passed by; far away from the rush of life in great cities the simple villagers pursued their homely tasks. The first threads of silver began to make their appearance as Radha's hair grew again, and still her heart was full of strange unrest. The fields had been ploughed, the grain scattered in the shallow furrows, and the first tender blades were appearing. The time had come round again for the *molakala punam*, or sprouting festival. On this occasion the children dress in their best and go round singing, asking for presents and alms; the farmers decorate their cattle by splashing colour on them and give them extra food and a rest; sprouting grain is offered at the shrines; a mixture called *panakam* is prepared of cocoanut juice and sugar water, to be poured out at the graves ot parents and relatives, where lamps are lit and a kind of ancestor worship is performed.

It was the afternoon of the chief day of the festival; every one in the village was preparing to go out to the cemetery. In merry procession the people straggled past Radha's house, carrying budding twigs and sprouting grain, also flowers and saucers of oil for the worship at the graves. Radha sat in her

house, alone and comfortless, in no mood to join the gay crowd and unwilling to take part in the religious rites, the efficacy of which she had begun wholly to disbelieve.

'Come, Radha,' they called to her as they went past her door, 'why art thou not ready? We are all going. See, here is some grain thou canst offer at thy husband's grave. Look, thy sister has already gone! Make haste!'

But Radha did not move. 'Not this year,' she answered in a tired voice, strangely out of tune with the brilliant sunshine and the flower garlands and bright dresses and jewels of the others. 'I will pray here at home; let me be. Do you go to the cemetery and worship there; I will meditate alone. Many have passed already, see them far ahead! But I would rather not come.'

They stared at her in wonder. 'What ails thee to-day?' they asked curiously. 'Thou art usually the first in religious exercises, and outdoest us all in thy zeal in pilgrimages. And now thou wilt not come to our worship at the graves. Yet thy own husband is buried here, and thy father and mother, and two little brothers, and thy brother-in-law too. How can a pious woman like thyself neglect the *molakala punam* rites? Alter thy mind and come with us.'

She only shook her head. 'No, I will stay,' she said unmoved. Tired at last of fruitless persuasion

the friends and neighbours moved on, and soon forgot her when they had joined the excited throng.

The footsteps of the last passers-by died away. Not a man, woman, or child was left in the village. From afar off sounds of laughter and talk floated across the still air of the hot afternoon, unheeded by the lonely woman. The sun sank lower, and still she sat there, thinking, waiting, praying, alone. Into her mind had come the recollection of a line in a hymn to Krishna :—

'Sinners shall be thrown on thorns,
Then with fire shall they be burnt.'

'Oh, how afraid I was when I remembered that! I could not help crying, and the more I thought about it the more I wept. I did pray with many tears to be saved from hell, but there seemed no answer, and my heart grew more and more heavy. The sun went down, and it grew dark ; but by and by the moon rose, and I sat in my room all flooded with moonlight, still weeping, and I felt so lonely and forsaken. I had sought so long, and nothing had ever come of it, and all efforts seemed so useless that I felt quite despairing.

'" Rise, and go to Rajapalli."

'Quite distinctly the words fell on my ear as I sat there in the silence. Whence came the voice? I was terribly frightened. " Who is there?" I asked, but I knew quite well that not a single human being

was in the village just then. I could not bear to remain in the house alone and went outside into the street, longing for the people to come back. But all the houses were quiet and deserted. At last I could not endure the sense of oppression any longer. I felt I must see and hear somebody; but I was ashamed to join the worshippers now, when I had refused to come in the afternoon. By a roundabout way I crept to the cemetery, and hiding in the shadows of trees and bushes watched the people; it was a comfort to see their faces and hear their voices. When I saw them prepare to go back, about midnight, I went quickly in front, and was in my house before I heard them coming up the village street.'

The next morning she would fain have believed it was all a dream. But the voice seemed ever ringing in her heart, 'Rise, and go to Rajapalli.' She could not get away from it. Yet why go to Rajapalli? There was no special temple there, nor a shrine, nor a holy river; she had never heard of any one going there on a pilgrimage. If Pushpa Yiri and Tirupati and the Rasverudu River had not helped her, why should Rajapalli? Still, it might be worth trying. Indeed, she would try. She would go at once. She went to tell her sister next door that she meant to start for Rajapalli immediately.

'I wonder what thou wilt plan next?' was the astonished reply. 'There's thy buffalo about to

calve, and the fields have to be weeded out now. Who is to see to all that? And what canst thou want in Rajapalli? We have some relations there, it is true; but why art in such haste to see them? All our lives we have done without them.'

''Tis true about the buffalo. I had forgotten that,' admitted Radha. 'And the fields must be seen to also. Well, I will wait till the work is done.'

Her patience, however, was not tried longer than a week; the fields were weeded then, and the buffalo with its new-born calf was safely installed in her sister's house. Radha locked her door and set forth again on the old quest, in obedience to an unknown voice.

On arrival in Rajapalli she found nothing that could justify her expectations. Her relatives were pleased to see her, and with true Hindu hospitality took it for granted that she should stay with them as long as she pleased. But otherwise life there was very ordinary: the farmers went to their fields; the merchants haggled in the bazar; there was nothing new or helpful in the few temples she saw, and sometimes she wondered whether the voice had not been a delusion and obedience to it a folly.

Then she heard of a great saint in a town not more than two miles away. A wonderfully pious man who was never heard to speak. There was a whisper that he spoke sometimes secretly to a disciple, but others denied this. There were darker whispers

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also, but they were kept low. At all events, he was universally worshipped. Though he was a Mahommedan, Mastan Sahib by name, Hindus flocked in great numbers to do him honour, specially women. Radha had not heard of this long before she was on the way to Kottacheruwu. She found the saint lying full length in the street, women kneeling round him with offerings of flowers; some garlands had been hung round his neck, others strewn on the ground. Then a woman squatted down and began gently to massage the feet and legs of the saint. Radha sat down also, and after performing her obeisance she took one of his feet on her lap and did the same. But in her case the meritorious act did not seem to find favour; Mastan Sahib claimed possession of his member and firmly drew it away. The other woman was allowed to go on. Radha came away, uncomforted, no healing here for a troubled spirit, and more days passed without bringing further hope or help.

She was sitting one morning in the house singing with great earnestness a hymn to Krishna when a visitor came in. He was in conversation with her uncle, but had noticed the words of her singing, and presently, after concluding his business, turned to her.

'Why praise Krishna?' he asked. 'Do you not know that Vira Santrayurdu[1] shall be born? Well, He has come.'

[1] Vira Brahma forbade his followers to worship idols. He also left them a prophecy: A virgin shall have a son,

'Who, who?' she asked breathlessly, her heart warning her that the end of her long search was at hand.

'Jesus Christ is His name,' said the visitor reverently. 'Come to the goldsmith's house over the way, and he will tell you more. They have books about Him there.'

'And who are you?' she asked, as she followed him across the street.

'My name is Laddi Mallana,' he replied. 'I am a friend of Sita Ram. Do you not know his story? He went to Bellary once, and got a book which he brought back here. He used to read it to us, and many of us know now that Jesus Christ is the true Incarnation. Sita Ram's widow lives here, close by.'

Meanwhile they had entered the goldsmith's door. 'Salaam, Venkamma,' said Sita Ram's friend to the mistress of the house. 'Is the master not in? Will you come, then, and tell this woman something about Jesus Christ?' and he left the two women together.

'What is that picture on the wall,' asked Radha eagerly, 'that woman with the baby?'

'It is a picture representing Jesus Christ as an infant with His mother,' replied Venkamma. Radha gazed and gazed. Rough woodcut as it was, there was something in its ineffable purity that sank deep into her soul, something, she felt, which differentiated

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Vira Santurdu. When he comes, there shall be peace in the earth.

it for ever from the pictures of heathen deities to which she had been accustomed. Merely to look at it seemed to bring her peace.

'Who was He?' she asked. 'Tell me about Him.'

But Venkamma was, as yet, a rather ignorant Christian herself, who hardly knew how the needs of this thirsty soul should be met. She began to tell Radha the story of Dives and Lazarus. Her eager listener could not, perhaps, draw very much nourishment from the recital, but she went home rejoicing, because she felt a door had opened in the blank wall that had ever confronted her hitherto.

'Come to our service to-morrow,' Venkamma had said. And she had gladly promised. But when the morrow came hindrances cropped up.

'A great pandit has arrived,' her relations said; 'he is reciting from the Bhagavatgita this morning. We are all going to hear him, and you must come too.'

'No, I cannot come,' she replied with determination.

'But why not?'

'I am going to the prayers of the people over the way.'

'What, the Christians? Take care that they do not bewitch you. It were better not to meddle much with them.'

'Still, I must go,' and thanking them for their offer she departed. It was a strange service to her. No idol, no flowers, no visible divinity, and no visible token of worship. Afterwards the teacher led her

apart and explained to her a little more fully the Words of this Life. She came back with the faint glimmer of light and faith in her heart glowing more brightly, feeling sure that salvation and forgiveness were to be found in this way.

After the evening meal she was called upon to sing; she had a great store of lyrics and hymns in praise of Krishna and other deities, and was often asked to entertain the company thus. But this time she declined. 'I have no desire to sing to Krishna now.'

'No desire to praise Krishna? Then whom would you praise?'

'I desire to praise,' she replied slowly and thoughtfully, 'the true God only.'

'But who is the true God?'

She could not remember any name; neither had she, as yet, understood the new teaching sufficiently clearly for any description. 'The God Whom they worship at the goldsmith's house. Him I believe to be the true God, and Him I will praise,' was all the explanation she could give.

The company sprang up, electrified.

'The Christians' God!' 'She is bewitched!' 'Did we not tell her not to meddle with them?' 'She has disgraced us!' 'Cast her out!' 'She shall not eat with us any more!' 'What ill-luck to have had her in the house!'

The angry voices stormed round the bewildered

woman. Plentifully threats and abuse were showered upon her, but it moved her not. 'I believe He is the true God,' she maintained steadily, in the midst of the confusion.

'Then go out of this house, that we may not share your disgrace!' And amidst their curses and maledictions she went out from among them.

A kindly neighbour took her in. The brave heart had stood firm in the storm, but now the tension was relaxed she broke down in bitter weeping. She felt so alone; her old world was slipping away from her, and in the new she had hardly gained a footing yet.

That night she dreamed a dream. Some great shining ones came round her, and one of them gave her a book. Next morning she asked the catechist what this could mean.

'Perhaps God will give you reading,' he suggested. 'Will you not come and live with us?' he added warmly, 'then you need not be afraid of anybody.'

But for this she was hardly prepared as yet. For us of the West, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to realise what it means to a Hindu to break caste. The sense of its sacredness is born in their blood and bred in their bone, the idea of violating it fills them with dismay and unspeakable repugnance, and especially would this be the case with a sternly conscientious nature like hers. So for some time she continued to live with the friendly neighbour, a fellow caste woman, who had taken her in when her relations cast

her out. But the close vicinity of these relatives was a daily trial; they never ceased to persecute her, when they met her they abused her and called down curses, they maligned her in the town, and at last her tender heart could bear it no longer.

'Take me to another place,' she implored the teacher. 'Take me to your missionary, and let me be baptized there. Then when I come back I shall belong to the Christians altogether.'

So she was taken to Anandapet.

'And from that time on,' she said, looking up with her bright smile, 'you know my story.'

Yes, from that time on we knew it. Her coming to Anandapet, her eager interest—never unready, never fatigued, in the things of God, her anxiety to learn to read, so as to be able to study the Bible for herself, her unwearied pains in this matter—we remember it well. For some time it was my privilege to read the Bible with her daily. One day we were reading the first chapter of Luke, and came to the verse, 'And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,' when suddenly she broke into bitter weeping.

'What is it, Radha?' I asked in consternation—for her face had always been like a living sunbeam—'what is grieving you?'

'Oh, amma,' she answered, as soon as she could

control herself, 'to think that those people so long ago pleased God as perfectly as that! And my past life has been so full of sin against Him, and even now that I know and love Him I grieve Him so often. What must my Lord think of me?'

Yet to us her consistent life was a perpetual refreshment and a perpetual admonition; the history of her life as a Christian harmonised with the seriousness, the depth, the reality of her conversion. Her whole heart was absorbed in the growth of the Kingdom of God, her whole life most simply and obviously at His disposal. As she received Christ with the simplicity of a little child, so she continued to walk with Him trustfully and joyfully.

Her thoughts naturally turned often to her nearest relative, the sister left behind in the little mountain village. She visited her after her baptism, and tried to communicate to her something of the treasure her heart had found. But her sister had always been a different nature, and for a long time Radha's words gained no influence over her. She could not remain there, as meanwhile she had begun to do the work of a Biblewoman in a more important centre, but she did better than try more useless persuasion, she betook herself to prayer. For five years daily her faithful heart besought the Lord on behalf of her sister. At the end of that time Radha persuaded her to pay her a visit, and to her unspeakable joy she found the soil had softened and was prepared

now to receive the Word. The sister, too, was baptized, and received the name Samadhanam, Peace.

For a time she lived with Radha, and then returned to her village home. Radha often feared for her faith; alone there in the midst of heathenism, herself so ignorant, being unable to read, unable also to learn anything more, with no teacher or fellow Christian near to uphold or instruct her, while pressure to return to the old ways was constantly exercised, her way was hard. But Samadhanam, though much tried, and perhaps sometimes wavering, remained true. Afterwards she told us some of her lonely experiences; how, for instance, once she had awakened early one Sunday, and, remembering it was the Lord's Day, longed to join some fellow Christians in praise and prayer. But there was no one, and she felt sad and lonely. Moreover, all the villagers were going to their ordinary field work, and expected her to do the same. However, she resolved to keep that Sunday; and, tying some cold rice in a bundle, and calling a neighbour's little daughter, set out for some lonely place in the hills far away from the village. There she held service. She only knew two lyrics, but these she sang over and over again, and told the little girl with her the few stories she knew about Jesus, and in two or three broken sentences offered prayer. At midday they ate the cold rice and lay down to rest, then sang the lyrics again, and as

the sun went down returned to the village, her heart comforted and gladdened she knew not how.

'Where have you been all day?' asked the astonished neighbours.

'It is the Christians' holy day,' she replied. 'We have been keeping it in the wilderness.'

Samadhanam has now come to live with her sister, and is learning to read, and we hope that later on she may help her sister in teaching others.

Radha is living and working now. What her influence in Rajapalli is I have tried to indicate at the beginning of the chapter. More incidents could be related to illustrate her faith, her self-forgetfulness, and her spiritual insight, if her story did not seem rather long already. Would that we met such spirits as hers more frequently in India! But such single-heartedness is rare, perhaps, even in a Christian country.

Yet to reflect on her history fills one with hope. May there not be at this very hour, in this vast continent of many peoples and tongues, seemingly given up to idolatry or to vain speculations which have no power to bring about a combination of practical righteousness and an inward and personal religion, many another serious, wistful, unsatisfied heart, strenuous and unwearied in its search after truth?

> 'If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me,
> Ye shall ever surely find Me.'

CHAPTER X

BY THE WAYSIDE

THE monsoon winds were tearing and shrieking over a grey and desolate landscape. The sky hung heavy with promising clouds, yet evidently no rain had fallen; everything in the plain was dry and bare, and the sand and dust whirled along by these wild, weary winds blinded the eyes and wore out the strength of the most energetic traveller.

But the travellers coming along the road now did not look as if they ever could have been energetic, their very gait seemed to express depression and disappointment, as well as fatigue. A company of men and women of all ages they were, tramping slowly and steadily on, and they had been tramping ever since morning; so they had yesterday, and so they would to-morrow, and still there would be many miles to go. Now and then one of the men would mutter angrily, as if he had a strong grievance against fate, but most of them seemed to accept their lot—whatever it was—with apathy and hopelessness, and

simply looked tired and cross. Occasionally some members of the party lagged behind, then the others would call, admonishing them to hurry, so as to reach the village before nightfall. Then the tired feet would make an effort, only to relapse into slowness again in a few minutes. This happened so often at last that the leader called a halt and granted a short time for rest; so every one squatted down then and there by the roadside in various attitudes of repose. A few lucky ones pulled out some betel nut and began chewing it. The rest doubtless envied them, but it was evident that no one had any food tied up in the various odd bundles and blankets they carried.

This was the discouraged-looking party that met our gaze as my Biblewoman and I were walking along the road. When we reached the group we stopped to talk to them, and the customary first question, 'Where do you come from?' opened the flood-gates of their grievance.

'In Kanumihalli, on the border of Mysore,' they began, 'a large bank was to be built for a new tank, a work of many months. The contractor was getting coolies together from every available spot, even from long distances, and we, too, were ordered to come, and several months' work on good wages was promised us. So we left our homes, and walked all the way; but when we arrived there the contractor said he had no work

for us, and told us to go home again. What could we do? We had taken food for the outward journey with us, and thought we should bring plenty of money back, and now we have not even food, but have to beg as we go along.'

We could hardly disguise the indignation we felt.

'But had you no one to speak for you? or had you no bond or any kind of writing to force the contractor to keep his word to you?'

'No, nothing. What do we know about writing? We cannot read if he does write. He told us to come, and promised work and wages; so we came. And now we have to walk back again with empty stomachs.' There was no resentment in their tones, it was all said with a kind of gentle apathy and hopeless acquiescence, for which despair would be far too strong a word. Such was the way of the world, and no one had a right to be surprised or to complain.

The Biblewoman and I looked at each other, divided between indignation at the ways of Hindu contractors and sympathy with their victims.

'I am afraid there is nothing to be done now. But, at any rate, they shall have a good meal to-night.'

We turned to the leader. 'How much rice do you need to feed your party?'

'Four annas will buy us sufficient for one meal,' he replied.

'Very well, you shall have that. Meanwhile, would you not like to hear about something that will last longer than a little rice, or even good wages? After all, you would have spent them in a month or two. And there are things which we need even more urgently than bread.'

The prospects of an evening meal being secure the wayfarers were willing enough to listen; they appeared even interested when we spoke to them of more abiding treasures than those which moth and rust can corrupt, and which thieves can steal. Indeed, their own religion has taught them so much, at least in theory, but practice is not dreamt of, and the precept to seek a higher treasure, therefore, appeared a new one to them.

'Do you think you will remember?' we asked.

'Oh yes, we will remember! But the sun is sinking, we ought to go on to the village where we are to rest to-night.'

'Yes, you had better go on now. Here are the four annas. May you get safely home.'

'We live through your favour. A thousand thanks!' Bowing and salaaming the travellers slowly resumed their journey.

We walked off in the opposite direction.

'Radha, do you think they will remember what they heard?'

'God knows,' she replied cheerfully. 'They were very hungry and tired, and they did like getting

their supper without further trouble. Now they can just buy rice and cook it when they come to the village, instead of having to go round first and try to get a handful in each house.'

'Some seeds fell by the wayside.'

But, perhaps, even in that unfavourable spot all is not lost.

Radha passed the same way next morning. There, a little further on from the spot where the band of coolies had listened the previous evening to the Words of this Life, she espied a prostrate figure under a tree. Was he ill, or merely asleep? Something in his attitude caused her to turn aside and look more closely. An elderly man, apparently faint with exhaustion, was lying there helpless.

She touched him on the shoulder. 'Are you sick? it is not well for you to stay here. Can you walk if I assist you?' she asked gently.

'I will try,' he gasped, and supported by her he rose and feebly tottered on; with many pauses for rest and breath at last they reached our camp. Food restored him somewhat, and he was able to make explanations.

'I belong to the people you spoke to last night on the road. Fever and dysentery had made me very weak. Yesterday we had no food all day. After you left us we went on towards the village, but I

felt too weak to go on so far, and said I would turn back to the hospital, as it was nearer. But I was so tired I had to lie and rest under the tree. And this morning I had no strength to go on.'

Radha ministered to him all that day in a way which astonished her patient. 'If I get better,' he remarked, 'I will serve your God. Our people do not do for each other what you have done for me. So I think your God must be the true one.'

When we broke up camp we left him in the hospital. 'Come and see me,' was Radha's parting injunction.

'I will,' he promised.

We do not generally attach much weight to such promises; but, sure enough, three weeks later, he stood at Radha's door one morning, convalescent, but still weak and shaky. Two months he lived with our Christians, daily receiving instruction, and, as far as we could judge, evincing much earnestness and intelligent apprehension of Christian truth. But he was restless to see his children again in the little village home, a great distance away.

'I will bring them here, and we will all be baptized together,' he resolved. So one day he set out on the homeward journey.

We never saw him again. Did he fall ill a second time, with no Radha to act as Samaritan to him? Very possibly; he was old and weak. Did he reach home, and his courage fail him at the thought of the

return journey? Did his friends dissuade him? Did the truths he had learned appear like an intangible dream to him when the old familiar life was round him again? We know not. On the King's highway we met him, and since God has many ways of reaching a human heart perhaps on the King's highway he may be walking now.

CHAPTER XI

'MY MOTHER'

WE were visiting by appointment—after a ceremonious interchange of notes—the ladies of some Brahman and high-caste families in the Telugu town where we lived. We met in each home with a kindly welcome; in some the children smiled and squatted down by us, and the women listened and talked with eagerness; in others we were offered chairs and treated with graceful if less cordial courtesy; no one stiffened or chilled as we sang our Christian lyrics, and spoke of the object for which we were there. Coffee out of big brass tumblers, with native cakes and sweets, were pressed upon us in one well-to-do house, and in each we were presented, according to the pretty Hindu custom, with flowers and fruit.

So that it seemed as if for this afternoon, at least, the shadowy side of Hindu life was to be kept out of sight.

We were paying our last call; it was to the wife of

a well-known Brahman vakil, or lawyer; he had had a thorough English education, and held comparatively advanced ideas on the woman question, in proof of which he showed off his young wife's educational attainments with evident pleasure. She was a pretty young creature, dressed in a gleaming silk *sira* of orange and warm browns: the slender waist was clasped with silver, and jewels loaded the little arms and hands. By her side on the bench—no one sat on the floor in this room, which had a semi-English air—sat her sweet-faced sister, another graceful girl in clinging silks and dull silver, with fragrant jessamine stars in her black hair.

They sat with clasped hands, being evidently much attached to each other, and after their first diffidence had worn off sang Sanskrit lyrics to us very prettily, and answered our questions with simple grace.

The husband—master of the ceremonies—whose face was remarkable for its keen and alert intelligence, stood by and talked to us with much vivacity and cordiality, sometimes in the vernacular and sometimes in English, in both with equal fluency. His women-folk had evidently benefited by his enlightened ideas; they *sat* in his presence, and ventured to speak to us before him. An engaging glance at the home life of the Hindu, was it not?

Suddenly at the threshold of the room in the open doorway appeared a figure so startlingly out

of harmony with the whole atmosphere we were breathing that it transported us with a shock into realities that we should hardly have guessed existed there. It was a woman, old and white-haired, with a face kindly and intelligent. But her limbs were barely covered with a miserably thin and scanty cotton cloth scarcely reaching to her knees; her bosom was bare; her hair unbrushed, unoiled, hung in white tatters about her face and neck; her whole air—neglected, despised, forlorn, solitary—proclaimed the word widow in unmistakable accents.

For one moment she stood in the door, an unutterably hopeless wistfulness in her mien, her pose, her silent, eager gaze. Our eyes and hearts took in the contrast with burning indignation. On the one hand were youth and charm, silks and scents and jewels, proud and careful guardianship and some degree of enlightened refinement; on the other the desolateness, the contempt, the dreariness, the humiliation of the Brahman widow's lot.

Our eyes met. Did she feel at all, I wonder, the rush of sympathy and tenderness that almost choked us?

It was only for a second that she stood there. Our Brahman friend, observing that our attention was diverted for the moment, followed the direction of our eyes, and seeing the pathetic figure that had riveted our gaze framed in the doorway, waved his hand towards her and exclaimed in an indescribably

airy and casual manner—that held, no doubt, a veiled command, for the old woman vanished instantly—'My mother!' Then he continued his ready flow of conversation, as if no interruption had occurred.

But the charm of that scented interior—with the youthful grace of the women and the bright intelligence of the man—was gone, and we soon took our leave. Sick at heart, we longed to ask to speak to his mother, but feared to do so, lest she should be scolded afterwards for her untimely appearance. As we left we felt all womanhood dishonoured in the dishonour done by that 'educated and enlightened' Brahman to the white-haired woman that bore him.

No longer of use to a man! What, then, was the *raison d'être* of her continued existence? In olden days *Sati* was the fiery answer to the question; and now that the British Raj has quenched those flames, misery and degradation, isolation and scorn burn the answer down into the depths of the Brahman widow's soul. The face of another white-haired Indian mother—also a widow—lingers in my memory as I write. One of her trio of daughters is a Bible-woman whom we much love and esteem; and her one son is a catechist whose spirituality and real devotion to Christ is very often a refuge for our hearts when discouragement threatens an entrance. A tenderly loved and honoured member of her family, it seemed to us when she came to spend

her last days with her daughter on our compound, that a fresh aroma of grace and goodness was breathed into our midst; and certainly none in our little circle of Christians enjoyed more devoted regard in her own family, or more affectionate esteem from the other members of our congregation, than she.

It is her image, loving and beloved, honoured and cared for in her gracious though dependent widowhood and old age, that is linked with the passing picture of 'My mother!' that photographed itself on my heart in the Brahman's house. Let those of us for whom very dear and sacred associations group themselves around the two simple words look at these two pictures, both painted in the colours of the Orient, until something is born in our heart that shall help to determine which is to be the prevalent and permanent type amongst our Indian sisterhood.

CHAPTER XII

SHADOW

'And the gods of the East made mouths at me.'
—R. KIPLING.

THERE was consternation in the village. 'The Mother'[1] had come. True, she came most years in the rainy season, but the last two she had passed them over, and they had, somehow, fancied themselves secure against her visits. But now she had come back undeniably, and the people asked themselves anxiously how they had aroused her anger.

But even the dullest had no need to ask long. Was not the cause of offence palpably plain to every one? Had not the foreign *dhora*[2] been round and spoken words about a new Swami, and had he not bewitched those sons of dogs, the low-caste Malas, to give heed to him? Had he not induced them to cut themselves off from Hinduism by having

[1] Cholera or small-pox goddess. One of the designations of Kali.

[2] European gentleman.

water poured over their heads while he muttered incantations? Had he not caused them to deliver up to him the sacred images in their houses, and with his own eyes witnessed the demolition of the little mud shrine under the neem-tree? And now these cursed people were holding their heads high because the dhora had built them a little schoolhouse, where their children daily assembled and drew letters in the sand and were actually learning to read. What business had they to mix themselves up with these foreign ways and despise the old? And why had they, the respectable caste people, not stopped all long ago?

To be sure, they had tried. Twice they had burned the thatched roof of the school, and once they had waylaid the teacher in the dark and given him a severe beating. But he had not gone away for all that. Then they had threatened to cut off the occupation of the Malas, which was the tilling of the village fields. Though, after all, it had been inconvenient to carry out the threat. Were not the Malas born to be their slaves and work for them? And now punishment had overtaken them all alike, 'the Mother' had descended in wrath, and had already demanded several victims.

But the worst of it was that these obstinate pigs of low-caste folk utterly refused to propitiate 'the Mother' by offerings at her shrine. There was an old man among them who resolutely counselled them to pray

only to their new Swami and have nothing to do with the old ways, which had been good enough for the village folk as far back as the oldest people could remember. One good thing was, they were suffering themselves, too. Their Swami did not protect them —that was plain. And if they would not yield and propitiate 'the Mother,' doubtless a worse fate would befall them.

So the village elders talked and prophesied, as they gloomily sat together in the wide recesses of the gateway where all village affairs were discussed; and the women-folk were not behindhand in angry condemnations of the things they had heard rumoured. Clustered in their clean-swept courtyards at midday, when a pause came in the labours of the day, they indulged in fearful whispers of what might befall were 'the Mother's' anger to continue.

In the huts of the Malas themselves there were frightened faces and more frightened hearts. They had tried to put on a bold front before others, but inwardly they were quaking. Could it be true what they were saying in the village, that their new religion was the cause of all the mischief? Yet the words the dhora had spoken had seemed so good. And the story of Yesu Swami was certainly wonderful. Surely He was the true Saviour? Why, then, did He not save them from this? To be sure, the cholera used to come before they had ever heard of Him. Still, 'the Mother'—was she really angry

with them? Would it not be wise to propitiate her by a little, just a little, offering? But the dhora had so strictly forbidden it, and the teacher might find it out. No, they really would remain faithful this year; 'the Mother' would depart again with the drier weather, and next year—who could tell what would happen next year? Perhaps she would not come at all.

So they argued, and Shantappa, the kindly old headman, who seemed more than any of them to have grasped something of the new doctrine they had learned, threw in wise counsel to the best of his ability. Would that his wisdom had extended to practical matters also! But on such themes as the cleansing of their huts, and the non-pollution of the neighbourhood of wells and river-banks, our urgent words used to fall unheeded to the ground. Their dirty hovels, it is true, received a partial spring-cleaning when we announced a tour of inspection among them; a task which we performed, it must be confessed, with some shrinking, in all the houses except one.

In that one lived little Sundri—Sundri of the soft eyes, and the gentle, intelligent little face. Sundri, who, in marked distinction from the other children, always looked clean, and had her hair neatly smoothed, and who tried her best to keep the little hut tidy. It was always a pleasure to us to see Sundri. The goodness and sweetness of her dis-

position made a specially congenial soil for the growth of the Christian graces. She got on so well with her lessons too; so well, indeed, that it seemed a pity not to educate her further by sending her to our Telugu Christian girls' boarding-school. But this proposal met with unexpected opposition, which for months we vainly tried to combat. However, in the end it was overcome. Sundri and her little cousin, Krupi, went to school and had a good time there.

This was another item of fear and grievance. Who had ever heard of a girl leaving her home except on visits to relations or to be married? Doubtless that was one of the reasons of 'the Mother's' anger. But Sundri and Krupi were back home now for the holidays. Surely they would not provoke 'the Mother' again by going back to school? The parents wavered. Perhaps it would be safer not. It *was* a great risk. And Sundri was old enough now to be very useful in the house. Besides, there was her marriage to be thought of. Yes, the girls should stay at home.

But the teacher urged otherwise, and we used every possible argument to enforce his words; and finally the day was won once more, and the girls went back to school.

The rainy weather passed, and with it the cholera season. The people breathed again freely, and our Mala Christians were left to worship their new Swami in their own way. Towards the end of the

school; that was a waste of time anyhow. Then, if no one came to school or service any more, perhaps the teacher would go away. And that very day they would worship under the sacred tree.

And so it was done. The teacher's words availed nothing, and Shantappa was no longer there to steady their weak, untrained faith and hold them back from carrying out the dictates of fear and alarm.

The shrine was rebuilt, and heathen rites were resumed. No more brown little figures came merrily trotting to school in the mornings, and at dusk the voice of prayer and praise was silent.

The schoolhouse lies now in ruins. The teacher had to leave, and we rarely visit the place now, as the people will have none of us.

But when next year's rainy season came round—though the old insanitary conditions continued—*there was not a single case of cholera in the village!*

CHAPTER XIII

'THE ONLY SON OF HIS MOTHER, AND SHE WAS A WIDOW'

IN the little verandah the servant was preparing to wash up the breakfast dishes. The table inside was nearly cleared; the date-mat was spread on the verandah floor, and an earthen pot with water and the inevitable maitie towel of doubtful tint were ready for operations. The scene looked domestic and inoffensive enough; why, then, suddenly this angry voice?

'No, indeed, amma, this will never do!' came the determined announcement. 'I am not going to let this go on!' And our faithful attendant flounced into the room in righteous wrath, carrying a dish which she pushed towards us and uncovered just before our faces with an air of angry triumph, as if she thought the sight of the iniquity within must carry conviction to the most hardened sinner's heart. But we could see nothing save the remainder of our breakfast, and looked at her inquiringly.

'And how do you expect to keep well, I should like to know?' she scolded. 'For two days now you have not eaten enough breakfast for a chicken. Of course, you will have a headache now. Did not Mr. Lewis tell me to look after you as my children? But how can I when you will be so obstinate?' And the beautiful hazel eyes blazed at us reproachfully.

'All right, Sita,' we pacified her. 'We will go for a long walk to-morrow morning, and then we shall be more hungry than after sitting for hours with the munshi. Take it away now, please, and come and put this room tidy.'

Still grumbling, she marched out, but returned presently with her dear old face all clear and sunshiny again. 'I have to go into the town,' she announced. 'There's a Weaver woman, in the street just across the market, who is very ill. She had three babies yesterday—two girls and a boy. Did you ever hear of such a thing? They have sent for me; they are afraid she is dying.'

'Very well, Sita, go and look after her nicely. I suppose it is no use offering her broth or something—they would not accept any food from us? But have you had your meal yet?'

'No, but it does not matter,' she replied cheerily; and the dear soul, who was so perturbed at our not consuming a sufficient quantity of curry and rice, went off without giving a second thought to the

fact that she had not yet broken her own fast that day.

We turned to our books again, and the midday hours passed in the attempt to master a few Kanarese intricacies. Presently we heard her voice again—

'Shall I bring the hot water and lay tea?'

'Yes, please; and how is your patient?'

'Oh, she is all right! She only wanted some food. They don't know how to look after her,' she sniffed contemptuously. 'They just left her, and, of course, she was exhausted. Really, some people have no sense.'

'Some people have, at all events,' we thought admiringly, as we looked into her motherly, handsome face. It was no uncommon thing at all for Sita to be sent for in cases of sickness. She never had had regular training, but she always seemed to know what to do when others were at their wits' end. No matter at what cost of fatigue or inconvenience to herself, she was unfailingly ready for service. And how we should have got on without her it is difficult to think. The first thing in the morning she would make the beds and dust the tiny sitting-room; and very amusing it was to teach her to dust pictures and photographs. I believe she used to wonder in her heart why we would have so many things about. Photographs she gradually learnt to recognise, and it happened less frequently that she put them upside down; but pictures of natural scenery remained a puzzle to her.

After she had got through the dusting performance she would cheerfully go to the well and bring the water both for kitchen and house use, and, on return, render what help she could to the cook. She even cleaned out the kitchen vessels. To one unused to the ways of this country, this seems nothing so very special; but the manager of an Indian household will know how extraordinary it is that any one should combine in one person the office of house-servant, water-carrier, and cook's maitie, the more so as this one person had been born in a high-caste house, where the idea of touching vessels a low-caste cook had handled was an absolutely impossible one.[1] But Sita was never one to care much for the opinion of others. Once the proud wife of a proud Lingait priest, she now acted most cheerfully and energetically as a sort of general factotum to us, and more affectionate and willing service we could not wish for.

That this was her destiny had certainly never entered the minds of the parents watching their little first-born in her cradle. She had been born

[1] The original intention of the founder of the Lingait sect was to oppose the caste system. He taught his disciples that all men were brothers. But, as so often in history, the high and pure ideal of the master degenerated in the hands of his followers. Ultimately the Lingaits simply constituted an additional caste. They consider themselves to be of the same social order as the Brahmans. The Brahmans do not share this view. In the general estimation the Lingaits rank fairly high.

in a large, wealthy house in a pretty town on the bank of the Tungabhadra River. Disciples plentifully flocked to the old Lingait priest, her father, and presents and fees kept the family in a state of almost affluence. They also possessed cattle, and from early years there was no lack of jewels for the handsome girl; indeed, true to Hindu custom, quite a little fortune was invested in her personal adornments. Her instincts of mothering and helping found scope only too early. Her mother died when Sita was but five years old, and three little brothers were left to be looked after. A few years afterwards, however, her father married again. Meanwhile, the usual fate of well-born Hindu girls had been hers: she had been betrothed. The bridegroom-elect was a near family relative, himself also a Lingait guru. The few years of girlhood passed all too quickly, and, at an age when many Western girls still play with, and love, their dollies, Sita had been married. Other women, doubtless, thought her fortunate: wealth, family, position, general respect, all were hers, and her happiness was crowned by the birth of a little son. The young mother had by then attained the age of fifteen.

The months that followed were of almost unclouded happiness, the great baby lover of after years watched her own wee boy in delightful absorption, the mother instinct in her fully aroused and satisfied. The honour accorded to her husband was reflected upon

her; the disciples that came to the house treated her as a matter of course with deference and respect; material cares she had none, and life seemed to stretch away before her flooded with sunshine.

But the cloud no bigger than a man's hand appeared one day on her horizon, and almost without warning overspread her whole sky. The storm broke, and the bolt fell which banishes for ever almost every ray of sunlight from an Indian woman's life. Her husband sickened, and a few days more found her thrust from her position of honoured wife and mother to that of an accursed and despised widow.

To the honour of the Lingaits it must be mentioned that they refrain from inflicting on their widows the disgrace of shaving the head, neither do they forbid them the wearing of all jewels and ornaments. Nevertheless it must remain true of Lingait widows in common with other Hindu widows that their position is 'one that for its attendant miseries and also its temptations to evil, has not, perhaps, its equal in the world.'[1]

The singularly strong and independent nature of Sita, though at first apparently crushed by the blow, learned to rally again. She was so young yet, barely seventeen! Gradually she grew accustomed to the loss of former happiness and many privileges, and to the ignominies and hardships of her present lot. And, besides, there was always the boy, the precious boy!

[1] See Padfield, *The Hindu at Home*, p. 240.

now nearly two years old. Whatever names others might call her, his sweet infant prattle to her had not changed, and though others might cast sour looks at her, and mutter curses that through her sins such an evil as her husband's death had befallen the family, the baby smiled just as readily and held out his little arms as enticingly as ever. And if people avoided looking at her in the street, or quickly turned a corner, that they might not meet so ill-fated a being, or if perchance coming on her unawares cursed their bad luck that day, and called on Govind or Rama to save them from the evil consequences of having looked on her, the boy knew naught of it all, but tottered to her with a shout of gladness, or clung weeping round her skirts when she moved away. Small wonder that her whole life with all its strong power of attachment and devotion centred in the little one. A world all her own was yet left to her in which, for a time, her whole being still could find satisfaction.

For a time. But slowly other needs began to awaken in her mind; aroused, perhaps, at first by the sorrow of the wife when the kind husband of her youth went into the great silence; strengthened, maybe, by the mother's love when she looked into her child's eyes, and questions vaguely sprang up, 'Whence? Whither? What is thy road, and who will guide thy little feet?' Questions and needs, unuttered longings and yearnings, how do they first

come to any of us? When does it first begin to glow—that Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world?

Sita was very ignorant. Her father and her husband had been priests, and the very fact seemed to have been enough religion for her. It was true she had been taught to worship Bassavana Yerbhadra, but her active, energetic temperament had always concerned itself more with kindly deeds than with religious rites, which did not seem to do much good to anybody. But as the years passed and the burden of life began to press more heavily on her young shoulders, her heart sometimes cried out for a deeper comfort. She sought, but she found none. There was no rest for the spirit in lighting lamps and offering flowers and strewing rice and pouring ghee before the stone idol. Months passed, and she grew more unsatisfied. Her little son had already begun to learn mantrams and prayers under a Lingait guru in preparation for his future priestly career, when the event occurred which was to change her life.

On his extensive tours throughout the district our honoured and beloved friend, the late Edwin Lewis, of Bellary, reached the town where Sita lived. His helper and convert, Chenappa, of Sundur, whose story has been told elsewhere,[1] accompanied him, and these two zealous evangelists began a vigorous campaign for Christ throughout the place. The bazar soon

[1] See *Chenappa and his Friends.*

buzzed with talk about them. It was the old story, 'Some mocked, and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. . . . Howbeit certain men clave unto him.' Although it cannot be stated in the full sense of the term that they 'believed,' at least they were interested and attracted.

Among these was a certain Ishwara, a friend of Sita's late husband. This man and Chenappa had many a long talk together. And it happened one day that one of these talks took place in Sita's house. Ishwara had come there on some errand, and Chenappa was with him. They hardly realised what effect their words had on the hungry, lonely heart of the young widow. She listened with all her might. Was there not in their words about One Who had come to earth in the likeness of man, Who had borne our sorrows and died for our sins, something that appealed to her consciousness of deep need?

'Tell me more,' she pleaded. It was not long before they had called in the missionary himself, and the Saviour's picture was set before her.

She received the Word with joy. There does not appear to have been a long period of doubt and struggle, of slowly breaking with the old and gradually absorbing the new. Her independent temperament helped her to see clearly and to decide firmly, and then steadfastly to abide by that decision. She asked for baptism, and after a suitable period her wish was granted.

Then the storm broke. Had Sita realised that following in the steps of the thorn-crowned Master the disciple must drink of His cup, a cup sometimes more bitter than death?

Her life had been hard before, now it became intolerable. On every hand she met with hatred and loathing. Curses and maledictions were hurled at her daily, hourly. Still she clung to her son. But even his baby heart they tried to alienate from the one whose sole remaining joy in life he was. And then, one terrible morning, she awoke to find him gone. Where?

They had kidnapped him, in the hope that if it were a question of choosing between her son and her new 'Swami,' mother-love would give the casting vote. Or if not, that at least the boy's mind should not be poisoned, but be trained in the old faith.

It was too much. 'My son! oh, my son!'

But there was no voice, nor answer, except cruel taunts.

'Give him back to me,' she cried with a breaking heart; 'I will do anything you wish.'

'Undergo the purification rites, then,' they made answer. 'Let your tongue be touched with heated gold, and you will be cleansed.'

'I cannot,' she moaned, 'I cannot deny the Saviour. But in mercy let me have my son! The light of my life! I must see his face or die! Give him to me!'

But only stony faces and more stony hearts were round her.

'Forsake your Lord,' they insisted relentlessly, 'or you will not have the child.'

Then her brave spirit embraced the Cross. In that hour the sword passed through her soul, but she stood firm.

'I will never forsake Him!' she said steadily; and for a time her tormentors turned away, baffled.

Sita was only twenty-two years of age even then. When we knew her, her face was graven with many lines; and perhaps that morning's renunciation had traced the first and deepest there. Her youthful beauty had given way to a nobler, if a sadder, grace; sorrow and high purpose had lent to her whole being a remarkable dignity, very characteristic of the Sita we learnt to love. Not that her strong passionate spirit learned endurance all at once. Sita could always, on occasion, answer fiercely and sharply, and even twenty years later, when something roused her, her anger could still leap up like a sudden flame. Yet in this furnace of anguish her young, untrained spirit proved true, and slowly disciplined itself to learn what comes so hardly to us all—to endure the Cross.

One thing was clear to her, to deny Christ her Saviour was impossible. All else could be borne, but not to be untrue to Him and to her deepest self; her

mother-heart might break in consequence, every morning the sight of her boy's empty cot might sting her afresh, every meal-time she might miss his prattle with a thousand pangs, countless times a day she might stand up listening for his little step and hungering for the touch of his soft hand upon her cheek, only to sink back in sick disappointment and despair,—well, God knew. She held on.

But it became evident that the old life could not be continued much longer. Relationships in that house had been strained to breaking-point, and it was not long after her baptism that Sita left her old home, partly by her own choice, partly through pressure from her relatives, who desired nothing better than to cast her off. She took with her her personal property, jewels to the amount of about 3,000 rupees; but on the way to Kotturu, where she was to join the little Christian community, thieves attacked the cart in which she was travelling, in a lonely part of the road, and she was robbed of everything. Destitute of all things and alone, the once so proud and wealthy woman joined the Christian circle at Kotturu. She was warmly welcomed; and it was not long before she was mothering all the babies in the Christian compound, and helping in every household when sickness or other emergencies arose.

Sita desired also to do some work in the Kingdom, and the missionary gave her tracts and Scripture

portions to sell. This, however, did not prove very suitable work for a woman in India; or, perhaps, difficulties arose because she had never learnt to read; at any rate this did not last long, and she fell back upon practical work and helpfulness, a part she was much better fitted to fill.

Her skill and readiness soon became known in the town, and her services were constantly in demand by women and children, and many a substantial present evinced the gratitude of patients whom she had successfully nursed. Besides this she traded a little with rice and vegetables, and thus managed to make a livelihood for herself; she always evinced a *nous* and capableness as delightful in a Hindu woman as it is rare.

So the years passed; babies she had seen born grew up into merry boys and girls, and passed into young manhood and womanhood; and still no tidings reached her of one who should have been her joy and stay all these years. How often in the many weary days when things were always more or less a struggle, her heart must have yearned for her son with unutterable yearning, who can say? But her efforts to discover his whereabouts had always been fruitless. Somewhere he was being brought up in the religion of his fathers, but where? The Lingaits are a numerous sect in South India, and the inquiries of an illiterate and poor woman were easily baffled. But her prayers rose day and night that she might

see his face again before she died. Then one day, all unexpectedly, the wonderful thing happened.

She was going to the well, her water-chatty on her hip, stepping out briskly—for there were always plenty of things waiting to be done by her—when her progress was arrested by a young man.

'Is this the Christian compound?' he inquired.

'Yes, it is,' she answered readily; for busy worker as she was, Sita always dearly loved a chat. 'Do you want any special person here? I can tell you all the houses.'

'I am seeking Lingait Sita,' he replied, eyeing her wonderingly. 'Which is her house?'

Her heart had begun to beat violently. She had noticed the 'lingam' fastened round his neck. And surely, surely, there was something familiar in those features?

'I am Lingait Sita myself.' Her answer came slowly, half chokingly.

A light leaped into his eyes. 'Then you are my mother!'

Thus after more than twenty years they met, strangers. In a few days he went back to live the life of a heathen priest, in a heathen town, the only one to which he had been brought up, and the only one in which he felt at home; while she continued her lonely, strenuous existence, with no closer love to cheer her than that of the two white women, who

had come to live for some years in Kotturu, and who owed so much to her faithful sympathy and care, and will never cease to think of her with real reverence and affection.

We are now in a different sphere, but Sita is still in the old dear place. Her life is not easy; she is getting on in years, and still earns her own living. Her son she sees only at intervals, and there is no sign that the desire of her life—his conversion—is any nearer fulfilment.

But He said unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the Kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.'

'Believest thou this?'

roused the indignation of his fellow villagers—while Prema was abused and beaten by his father. One day the latter, in an access of rage, tore the Christian tali—the marriage symbol of the Hindus—from off the neck of the young wife,'and, taking the little metal pendant on which was fashioned the Christian symbol, beat it down with a hammer till every sign of it was effaced.

Virappa offered no remonstrance, and the enraged man, taking courage from his son's silence, began an even worse form of persecution, and tried to force his daughter into unnameable evil. Her resistance increased his hatred and brought fresh sufferings on her, till at last, during one of the long absences of her husband in camp with the Government official in whose service he was, his cruelty reached such a pitch that the broken-hearted girl sought refuge with Mariamma, one of the Christian women of the same village.

One evening as we were sitting in the bungalow we were surprised to see Mariamma come in weeping and indignant, and, on inquiry, she poured forth the story we have related, which up till now they had with much patience and courage kept to themselves. We told Mariamma to bring the girl up to us at once, and before dark she was safely sheltered under the mission roof.

The next day Obigardu came up in a white heat to demand his daughter-in-law, whose wages as a coolie

—to which work he had quite unnecessarily forced her—he had no intention of relinquishing.

We had taken the precaution of consulting a police official immediately on hearing the facts, and were able to inform Obigardu when he talked grandly about our theft of his daughter-in-law and his indefeasible right to her during her husband's absence, that, under the English Raj, as Virappa had shown himself quite unfit to protect his wife from violence and ill-usage, she was quite at liberty to leave him if she chose, and live elsewhere, being of age.

Finding his declamatory and indignant eloquence of no avail, Obigardu at last left, threatening to take out a warrant against us. His wife was the next to appear on the scene, and she brought a different kind of artillery to bear upon us.

Finding, however, that cajolery and cunning were of no more avail than her husband's threats and anger, she also departed to nurse schemes of vengeance against the Christian woman under whose wing Prema had taken refuge, and whom she considered responsible for her abduction by us.

So during the next few weeks poor Mariamma had much to bear. Indigenous enthusiasm Obigardu had not at his command, as the Malas of his community knew about his treatment of Prema and did not pretend sympathy with him; but he hired women of the baser sort to waylay Mariamma at night as

she was returning to her home after dark, to frighten, abuse, and ill-treat her.

Periodically he came up to remind us that the reward of our iniquities was not far off, and that the machinery of the law had been set in motion against us, and after about ten days had elapsed, produced against us in triumph his son, who had just returned from camp.

Virappa, well primed to his part, acted the surprised and indignant husband to perfection, and with much show of firmness and some of dignity demanded back his wife.

We then stated all that had happened, reminding him of what he himself had seen, unremonstrating, of persecution and violence, and trying to bring home to his craven consciousness the danger to which his young wife had been subjected. We also explained to him with some emphasis that, as a Christian, she was within the radius of a new and not ineffective protective force.

He listened with apathy, and answered that he had put Prema in charge of his father, and was satisfied with his care of her.

It was my turn to be angry then, and, for the first time in my dealings with the Hindus, I made no effort to restrain it. Springing from my chair and facing the abject creature who had vowed to love, honour, and protect poor Prema, I poured forth the vials of my wrath upon him; asking him, to begin

with, whether one gives the lamb to the tiger to guard, and assuring him that, if he was unable or unwilling to defend his young wife from the nameless persecution of his father, the Christian community which she had entered was both able and willing.

Virappa seemed for the first time thoroughly cowed, and left the bungalow in silence—not, however, the compound, which he haunted perpetually, trying to win his poor little wife to return with him to his father's house.

And at last, by promises, or threats—who knows? —he brought her, shamefaced and cowed, to us, saying that she was willing to go back with him. Then our hearts sank within us. It was easier to combat the threats and fury of the father and mother-in-law than to uphold the weak power of resistance and the malleable will of this poor girl.

We knew, however, only too well what awaited her if she returned to the old circumstances.

Obigardu had never ceased, in the vilest language and with the utmost publicity, to abuse, insult, and threaten her. Far too horrible for these pages were the things he said (and, strange as it may seem, *sang*), that he would do to her on her return, of which he always expressed himself confident; and we knew that her unexpected resistance, so far, would lend a keener edge to his cruelty, once he had her in his hands again, and that she would not escape him so easily a second time.

hands are empty. Come dressed in police uniform, bringing your necessary household articles with you, and then I may believe that you intend making a fresh start with your wife in a new home.'

'The Dhoresani is mistaken; I am really going this hour.'

We smiled upon him, and he took a rather ignominious farewell.

Not that day, nor the next, nor the next, did he start for his work, and we waited somewhat wearily for his final submission. At last, on the fourth day, in his official garb and with a promising bundle in his hand, with no smiles at all, but subdued and serious, he came to take her away in good earnest; and having ascertained in various ways that the bundle and the uniform represented a genuine resolve, we called Prema and committed her to him.

Now there seemed an opportunity to get at his heart, if he had one, and we had a long talk with him, to which he seemed, at any rate, to respond with some real shame and sincere desire to be a truer husband in the future.

They left us with a mixture of smiles and tears, and we watched them down the sunny white road until they disappeared.

It was a relief to hear from Prema, a few weeks afterwards, that her husband was keeping his word, and that she was happy and hopeful in her new life.

She may have to return to A—— with her husband later on; but we fancy Obigardu has learnt his lesson now, and will understand better the position of a Christian wife.

'Adrushtam, it is your ill-fate! No one can help their fate,' they consoled me courteously.

'I do not mean that I lost my husband. I was never married to any one.'

This time they stared at me in incredulous astonishment. But in the end it improved my position of saintliness.

'Mother of charity, what merit! Mahabhakti, great is your piety! Not married, never married, and has given each child a glass bangle!' (the destination evidently of my *pice*). 'Salaam, Divinity, you are going, mother? Salaam, talli,' &c., &c. For a long time I could hear their exclamations as I rounded the craggy hill, behind which I came to another village.

Here children were driving out buffalo herds, crowding a stream-bed I had to cross. Lest they should take offence at me or my umbrella, I tried to propitiate them by clicking my tongue in the way I have heard herd-boys do, an art in which I cannot get accomplished, but I did my best. The buffaloes took it indulgently, and let me pass. Of two men sitting under a tree I inquired if this were the right way to the village of my destination. They responded by a motion of the hand as expressive as the clearest explanation, which seemed, indeed, to waft me half way there. The path became more stony, and sloped steadily upwards to a low range of hills, the top of which at last I gained.

I had now walked between three and four miles, and began to wish my bandy would catch me up. But no sound of cart-wheels reached me. I was surrounded by a silent, rocky, bushy wilderness, where large cactuses grew, and tall, reedy grass, and shrubs with golden yellow flowers, but no human habitation was in sight. I crept under the spreading branches of a big cactus-tree, and putting a stone or two against the trunk for a seat, sat down, and waited. White butterflies danced about, paying their morning calls to the flower shrubs; the monotonous notes of the 'brain-fever bird' filled the air, and now and then came the sweet, ringing call of a bulbul to its mate, imperious and passionate and unforgettable. Farther away on the slope of a hill I presently discerned the figure of a man moving slowly and then stooping down to cut the long grass. Probably it was to thatch his hut, but his occupation and the tall, thin stalks of grass waving all round me suddenly sent my thoughts off in a direction which bereft the wild and exhilarating scene of its peace and morning glory.

Not long ago a tragedy in which this grass played a sorry part—a little and sordid tragedy, no doubt, only the loveless exit from the world of an unwanted woman, hastened by her affectionate relatives—was witnessed by my Biblewoman in a little country town. She had been teaching a young Shudra woman for some time. This girl fell very ill. One

have been. For when one is tired and hungry and dusty one would just as soon not be the object of the engrossing interest and naïve stares of consecutive groups of people. The sense of some hidden mystery behind the enclosing tent-flap excited their curiosity to an unbearable pitch, and though their water-pots indicated a purpose in their walk, their leisure for observation when such an anomalous spectacle presented itself to them, was apparently unlimited.

With some of the women I exchanged greetings. In the quiet routine of village life my visits take rank as events, and as they gazed at me with friendly, wondering faces memory began to stir, and they remarked, with conviction, 'You came before.'

In the background there was a hopeful clatter of dishes, and as the servant brought breakfast the adults hardly needed the hint, 'Going to have her rice,' to disperse. For it would be a gross breach of common Hindu etiquette to watch a person eating. The children were not so easily repressed. I saw them scuttle into the ditch; with the silence and litheness of little Red Indians they cautiously crept up again, till their eyes were on a level with the sandy bank and could peer at me through a bush, whence with untiring gaze they enjoyed the entrancing vision of a missionary consuming her breakfast.

It was now between eleven and twelve o'clock, and I went to the village to see the women. There was

one Christian family there, and one or two others who had given their promise to send their children to school and to be taught themselves. Only, alas! we had not yet found a teacher to place there. So they had grown lukewarm again. There was this to be talked over, and one or two other matters, with the Christian family.

I found old Sarah cleaning her floor with cow-dung; as it was still damp, I sat on a bundle of grass by the door. The women from the neighbouring huts sat near in the sunshine, and the inevitable babies crawled about everybody. From the fields close by came the creaking, screeching sound of unoiled well-wheels which a couple of patient bulls were slowly turning by going down into a pit and marching up again, causing a simple, self-acting contrivance to pour the water into the channel for the thirsty fields.

'Where is Obalamma?' I inquired of Sarah.

'She has gone out to coolie work.'

Obalamma was her daughter. Her case is typical of thousands. She was betrothed to her mother's younger brother, the inevitable custom if a woman has a younger brother and a daughter. But being a generation older than the girl, the man is often not willing to wait till she is of age to marry, and meanwhile takes a substitute. The arrangement is meant to be temporary, but the complication of children often renders it a permanent one. Obalamma's 'husband'

had done this, and there was now a family of four little ones. Their mother was of a fierce, jealous disposition, and although Obalamma was of marriageable age now, and her husband had asked her to come, the older woman threatened to beat the life out of her if she ventured to set foot in the house. The man seemed to be of the weak and foolish sort who desired peace, but lacked the strength to make it. So the poor, little lawful wife abode at home.

The father and mother were baptized, and Obalamma ardently desired it also, but as she was legally married to a Hindu the wisdom of such a step was doubtful. Meanwhile I was often troubled over her. In a Hindu community of low caste a marriageable girl not with her husband is exposed to grave temptations. This difficulty, at the root of which lies the whole Hindu marriage system, has thwarted us many times in our work among the Malas.

Obalamma with much trouble I had persuaded to go to our boarding-school. She went for three months, but after the holidays, to my extreme disappointment, did not return. 'Too much work there,' was one report. 'Her husband would dismiss the other woman and have only her, and she was to go to him at once,' was another. The exact reason I could not find out. When I asked Sarah now, she gave me a third one, and vowed it was the only one —'Her brother was ill, and cried for her to stay at home.'

'I am afraid she has now lost her chance. So many want to come to school that her place has been filled. And, besides, a big girl like that cannot be taught the alphabet over and over again. She has forgotten in these six months what she has learnt in the three at school, and now she must stick to field work. But I thought her husband wanted her?'

'No, it is all a lie; he never will let the other woman go, and how can he with four children? He says he will keep two wives, but this other one will scratch out Obalamma's eyes if she goes.'

Truly it was a perplexing situation, and as the school had failed I knew not what fresh arrangement to suggest, and had to let things be *in statu quo.*

But another matter I was resolved to mend.

'Joseph, come here, you little rascal!'

Joseph was the youngest son, and as there was no school here he was placed with a Christian family in a village five miles away where there was one. Joseph, however, occasionally played truant, and now he was caught in the act.

'Come here, Joseph!'

But Joseph would by no means come here, and slid away to hide. His mother, however, dragged him forth.

'Now, Joseph, why are you here and not at school?'

No answer.

'Speak to Missiamma when she asks you,' his

mother exhorted him. But his lips only closed more obstinately.

Sarah administered a sound cuff, and her voice rose to a strident scream. 'Will you tell what you told me?'

But young Joseph had made up his mind that silence was a safe policy, and silence he would observe.

Sarah changed her tactics.

'Did you say the teacher beat you?' Taken unawares, Joseph responded by a mute nod.

'And you deserved it, too, I expect,' I threw in, anxious to uphold authority. 'Is that why you stayed away?'

He nodded again.

'You must go back to-morrow. You can go with my cart. Will you go?'

He grunted assent and skipped away, and I turned the shower of admonitions on the mother, for with all her cuffing and scolding before me, it was quite clear she had made no effort to send him back to school, and was probably glad of his presence at home during harvest-time, when work and wages were open even to small youngsters. Alas, for the difficulty of planting the ideas of perseverance, regularity, endurance, orderliness, into such uncongenial soil! Uphill work, indeed! Would Obalamma and Joseph ever learn more than their parents?

During this conversation a shepherd woman came

round the corner with her three months' baby on her arm. She was a friendly listener, and always extended a cordial invitation to me to come and talk in her verandah, though she did not go so far as to ask me inside her house. She had only one room, so the cooking had to be done in it, and, of course, her cooking vessels had to be kept sacred from alien gaze. It was with an odd sensation sometimes that, sitting in her verandah, I had watched her cows troop in and out, and felt I was not counted worthy to go where the beasts went.

As she came near our group that morning I saw that she looked rather thin and worn.

'Amma, you have such nice cows; do you take plenty of milk yourself? That would be good for you, and for the little one, too.'

To my surprise she looked quite horrified. 'Every one says that if you drink cow's milk while nursing a baby you will die. There was a Mahommedan woman in Kallur with a little baby; she took some milk, and died.'

Vainly did I protest. She listened politely to my persuasions, but though she offered me milk I am sure she was unconvinced.

Another woman came up whom I knew. She belonged to the Weaver caste. Her face always wore a troubled expression. When asked about her home, she would say her husband was dead; but once in a moment of confidence she had burst

into tears and told the truth. He was not dead, but had left her with her three little children, and in the village not far away was living with another. His wife deserved special respect, for she had managed to support the children and keep straight herself—no easy matter. To-day she looked very contented. 'After these two years my husband has come back to me,' she whispered, when she had a chance of communicating her good news, and we rejoiced with her.

While talking to the other women and trying to find out in what proportion the motives that brought them to ask for a teacher were mixed, and which preponderated, a woman hawking native woven stuffs for the picturesque little jackets which the women wear, joined us. Everybody's talk became instantly very feminine.

'That is a pretty colour!'

'But it won't wash.'

'I like that border.'

'The stuff is so loosely woven. A jacket will not last three months.'

'How much is this one?'

I am afraid I was as interested as any of them—possibly more so, for I had the option of buying, while the women round me were all too poor to indulge in the pleasures of shopping.

'Show me that striped green with the red border,' I demanded; 'how much is it?'

'Three annas.'

'Two and a half,' I haggled, sure she was asking too much, and having a vague idea that it was wrong to raise the ordinary prices.

'All right! you are the great mother; if the mother asks I must give.'

Uneasily I consulted my other friends. 'Is not two and a half very dear?'

'Yes; dear,' they confessed.

'It is too dear,' I said with much assurance; 'you must give me four for eight annas.'

'*Maha talli*, great mother, it is impossible! On two and a half I make not a fair profit; but if you ask, what can I do? I pay two and a half myself—no one else should have it under three annas, but you are a great one, so I give it—and I am a poor woman, and my husband is dead. I have only one son; he is not married yet——'

'Yes, it is true,' the others chimed in, 'she is a widow; we know her son.'

'Very well, I will take these,' I said, concluding the bargain; it was to encourage her, I persuaded myself, not quite sure whether all the time it was not just the reprehensible feminine vice of buying things you do not need, besetting one even in the wilds of India.

Nursamma, the seller of such tempting wares, stayed to talk. Plague had recently invaded our neighbourhood, and she asked after its pro-

gress. This set the tongues of the other women going.

'What happened in Karvor? A man went there, and they gave him a passport which he was to show every day for ten days to the doctor. He did not understand, or did not want to go, so he threw the paper away. For that they burnt him alive; that was the order from Government. Yes, they really did; they will not have disobedience. But fancy burning him alive!'

They actually believed it. Their minds were mediæval. In the olden times such a punishment for trifling offences was quite conceivable. But in the end my reiterated assurance of the utter impossibility of such a procedure now, shook their faith in the story. Nursamma helped me. She had travelled about in the district, and was an intelligent woman of affairs. Her admiration for the English and their improvements—the railway, the telegraph—was unfeigned.

'They were born with merit, that is the reason of it all. You, O mother, were born in great merit! I saw your tent as I went by. Some one fetches your water, and does your cooking. We are sinners, so we must do all that ourselves. It was written so in our foreheads.'

'Oh, Nursamma!' I could hardly burst forth fast enough on the blessings of work, the variety of it (they could scarcely believe that I work hard in

my way, too, though I cannot balance a full water-pot on my head), the folly of superstition, and the reasons which had made England a great nation, of which surely Christianity was the chiefest. The field was free, the women had ample leisure; and this quiet kind of talk, five or six sitting round, one turning the wheel to wind the cotton, one nursing her baby, the others in happy laziness, is the opportunity when it seems most easy to pour one's heart out to them. How had Christianity influenced the English? What example had its Founder shown? How had He lived on earth? Who was He? What could He be to us? So one subject led to another; willing listeners encouraging me to go on and on, until at last the heat and glare of late midday suggested to us all alike the need of a little rest, and the group dispersed.

On my way back to the tent I noticed a woman standing on the bank, shading her eyes with her hand, and straining them to catch sight of something in the distance. When I came near she turned her face, and I saw the tears race down her furrowed cheeks.

'Oh, amma, what is the matter?'

'My child,' she sobbed; 'my child! My only daughter! Look! there she is going away to her husband's house.'

Far away in the distance, in the path over the plain, I could discern some vanishing specks.

'Yes, those are they. How can I go back to my empty house? No one is there now, no one to speak to me, no one to care for. My child! my little daughter! She was always so good to me; but now she must go to her husband. I am left alone; what shall I do?' She turned to me with a pathetic look of bewildered pain.

'Thou countest all my tears. Thou hast put them into Thy bottle.'

Was God counting now the tears of the poor lonely woman here weeping over her common human grief—so common, so human?

The extraordinary words of Christ about the hairs of our head being all numbered came into my mind.

'Amma, what do they call you?'

'Nagamma.'

'Nagamma, you need not go back to the house alone. There is One to speak to. One to care. One who grieves because you sorrow. One who knew sorrow Himself. Ah, Nagamma, if we really believed Him we should never feel lonely and sad; for He is a closer Friend than any one. His name is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. Will you try and believe that He loves you?'

She looked at me wondering.

'Yes, He, the great God, I know; but my child, I want my child!' And little able in her grief to take

in a new message, she turned slowly and sadly towards the village.

My rest in the little tent was soon interrupted. Sarah was returning my visit, and I grasped the reason, had, indeed, provided for it. Knowing them to be miserably poor, I generally in the cold season gave her a warm garment, for the nights were chilly. So I cut out for her a jacket and tacked it, leaving the sewing to Obalamma. She departed joyfully.

The sun had turned westward over the water, and the river seemed a liquid mass of light. It was nearly half a mile from bank to bank, but it is hardly ever full. Mostly it is but a weary waste of sand, and the narrow channel of water, which even I could jump, had to be dug daily by the villagers, lest the sand should smother it altogether. But this year there had been plentiful rain, and the river was still more than half full, and in places running swiftly.

I sat in front of my tent and watched the people cross over. There was one treacherous place where evidently there was a sudden dip in the bottom. I grew nervous as I saw the people approach it, and, indeed, many had stumbled alarmingly. An old man came from the further bank sounding his way in front with a stout staff. When he came to the dip his staff apprised him of it, and he retired, making a wide circuit. It availed him not. The water flowed deep and swift where he tried higher up; it went up to his knees, over, higher, up to his thighs, and still

the staff went in deeper in front; he stood still, tottering a little, the water racing round him. Then, slowly, he turned. He could find no way of crossing.

I watched him return all the way to the other bank. Strange that no one happened to be crossing just then to offer him help. Was there no Greatheart for this timid Ready-to-halt, who had drearily turned back, alone and discouraged, failing to reach his goal because there was none to show him the way?

It was cheering to see the majority less easily dismayed. Old women and young ones, always with a male protector, whom they clutched where the current ran strong, crossed safely; children, too, lifted in strong arms over the deep parts. Burdens were carried over, successfully poised on steady heads.

The sun sank lower, and the water and sky melted into one sea of glory. The figures that from the eastern shore, where I was sitting, passed westward through the water, seemed to be making straight for the pearly gates of the Heavenly City. I watched in fascination. So near the river, on the very bank, and there, on the other side, shone the streets of gold. And still the people were passing over, passing through the radiant flood to the unearthly glory of that far-off shore, reaching the haven where they would be: 'Which when I saw, I wished myself among them.'

With a wrench I tore myself away from the sight, and turned eastwards towards the village. It was

earth, indeed. The air was filled with dust and sand where the herds had passed home, sheep were bleating, dogs barking, babies crying, women quarrelling, men shouting. I passed through the babel to Sarah's house. The men-folk had come home, Obalamma too, and as we had no building to meet in, we met under the sky. Our evening hymn attracted some other villagers to the simple service, and they sat about on the ground in the dark. I had brought no lantern, as the insects attracted by the light prove disturbing, so I could not see to read, but just talked to them from my heart. And there in the wilderness, in the heart of superstition and idol worship, our voices were raised in prayer to the One Name by which men must be saved. And then I went home in the dark to the little tent, and slept under the banyan-tree, while close by, shepherds had lit their fires, by which they would sit and watch their flocks by night, and a few steps away the now dark and silent river rippled past in the starlight.

CHAPTER XVI

AT A THEOSOPHICAL MEETING

MY hostess and I were talking together in the little verandah of the upstair room in the house adjoining the bazar, which served her as a dwelling-place during her visits to India, whose people she loves. It certainly had a charm of its own to live practically in the native town, and form, so to speak, an integral part of its life. From our exalted position on the roof we could see the goings on in two streets, as well as in our neighbour's courtyard, and at sundown we spent many a half-hour leaning over the parapet and watching the procession of life below, wondering how it would feel if we were Hindu women, and these glimpses the only ones that were allowed us of the outside world; or real *purdah*, when even these would be denied us.

Just on the other side in the road below stood the huge car of Juggernaut, fortified now against the rains by a dilapidated covering of mats; and almost directly behind it rose the white dome of the principal mosque

THE HUGE CAR OF JUGGERNAUT.

[illegible]
TIL[illegible]

in the town, leaving us in no doubt about the living reality of India's two principal faiths.

Behind both towered the enormous solitary hill older than either, upon which both had stamped their impress, for legends and myths of Hindu saints and *sanyasis* clustered round certain spots there, marked by shrines and temples where the pious would still repair for worship. But the intolerance and religious zeal of the Mahommedan conqueror was also exhibited by the empty niches bereft of images on many a wall and tower. Many of the dethroned gods and goddesses were now lying about in ditches, or by the roadside. Some, however, had been rescued by English officials—lovers of Hindu antique—who adorned their gardens and tennis-courts with the grotesquely-carved pillars, and with the—to Western taste—hideous idols hewn in massive stone, scorned by the less tolerant adherents of an iconoclastic faith. That these latter possessed strategic genius as well as fervent zeal, was indicated by the magnificent hill fortifications, fully availing in times gone by, but now crumbling into ruins. Prickly pear was growing in the broad fort ditches, and the goats and sheep were grazing on the sunny tops of the old fort walls.

And here in the town below we sat on the roof of the old Brahman house, realising the curious incongruity between our modern afternoon tea-table and the great hill opposite with its historical associations; haunted by the sense that on some

distant day the English Raj, too, would be a legend of the past, and the vivid life and stirring of the present no more than a vanished and forgotten dream.

Our conversation was very engrossing, so much so that one of the greedy monkeys which infest the hill and the town in countless numbers, took shameless advantage of our abstraction, and with one swift bound pounced on the table and carried off the cake. To our chagrin it took refuge on the roof just out of reach, hugging its prey with one arm and breaking bits off with the other hand in a most exasperating way, while we shook metaphorical and ineffectual fists at it, which the creature seemed to regard with amused equanimity.

W returned to our talk.

'So you have really joined the Theosophical Society here?' I asked. 'Would you mind explaining to me what that means?'

'It means very little,' was the reply. 'You see Theosophy involves no creed of any kind. The one thing you have to believe in is the universal brotherhood of man. The real reason why I joined it is that some of my Hindu friends here declared that if I would take a practical interest of this sort in their meetings it would help them to live out better their own beliefs in ordinary life.'

'And they meet every night? What do they do? Do you go often?' My thirst for information was unfeigned.

'Yes, every night. But sometimes only two or three come. I go three or four times a week. They read a verse or two of the Bhagavatgita and then explain it, or discuss it, a kind of Bible-class, with their own scriptures for a text.'

A thought struck me. 'Do you think they would allow me to come too? It would interest me very greatly. Of course, as a guest at their own meeting. I could not take advantage of their courtesy in admitting me, to ask them to listen to what they did not wish to hear.'

'Well, we could, at any rate, ask. I shall tell them you are a missionary, so if they invite you it will be with their eyes open. But I expect they will be very pleased.'

So a note was despatched, and brought in answer a cordial invitation to me to attend their meeting whenever I liked. We arranged to go that very evening.

Night had fallen when we made our way hardly further than just across the road to what was termed 'the lodge.' We passed through a courtyard and entered a long, narrow room where half a dozen figures rose up to greet us, and were one by one introduced. Chairs were brought for us, but as the others were sitting on the ground we preferred to join their circle and were soon seated on the floor, only conceding to our Western bones the luxury

of a cushion! Two candles were on the floor giving sufficient illumination to decipher the copies of the Bhagavatgita lying before each of us, but leaving the rest of the room practically in darkness.

I glanced round at the company. There was the Tahsildar, a solemn, dignified man, without a grain of humour (a quality in which Hindus as a whole seem somewhat deficient), for never would even the ghost of a smile haunt him. He, as I soon found out, monopolised nearly all the talk, and calmly ignored the arguments and contributions to the discussions brought forward by the others: 'I go on where I left off,' he remarked naïvely.

Opposite him sat the Munsif, of imposing proportions. He spoke excellent English, but his voice could grow strident on occasion. He seemed to find any sort of strictures on his arguments difficult to bear, and when he had scored a point—or thought he had—could not suppress a covert smile and a rapid glance all round demanding appreciation. He and the Tahsildar were evidently rivals in the Society, though while we were present they joined forces to offer a united Hindu front to any Western remarks.

Next to him was Narain Rao, a stout Brahman pleader, ever ready to smile, whose remarks were trite and vague mostly, and fatiguingly verbose, and his English indistinct. He nevertheless, possessed some claims to originality, at least in that circle; for

he was the only Daveita among them, an adherent of the dual principle which declares God and the soul to be distinct from each other. The rest were all disciples of the Adveita philosophy, which passionately upholds that God and the soul are for ever one.

A little removed from the circle, as if he had no desire to press forward, sat Srini Vasa Rao, another pleader, upon whom I quickly learned to look as undoubtedly a gentleman. He never interrupted, and never missed a chance of insisting upon fair play for every one by repeating questions asked by more retiring members which had been allowed to pass unheeded. 'You were saying . . . ?' fell many times from his lips during the evening; and I profoundly admired his patient and courteous way of going after and rescuing the lost and strayed bits of conversation—a rare art.

Another pleader of like mind with him came in a little later. Him I knew already as one of the best examples of New Hinduism, and a true reformer. Unlike many of the latter whose energy evaporates in talking, this man had acted. Years ago he had expended untold time and trouble and sacrificed caste privileges in order to bring about the re-marriage of a Brahman child widow. The story is an unusual one, not without a flavour of romance.

Rangavachari's and Narainamma's parents were

neighbours, and the little boy and girl played together daily in one another's courtyards. Naraini, alas! was a child widow; and perhaps the deprivations and ignominies which he saw his little friend suffer developed a strain of chivalry—so rare among Hindus generally, but inherent in his nature. For the lad seems early to have determined to create a happier lot for his little playfellow, and the years did not relax this resolve. He himself was betrothed and married at the usual early age, and as soon as he had arrived at independence in his career he took steps to secure domestic happiness for his friend. Cautiously he advertised the case in certain reform newspapers, to see if any one would be bold enough to offer himself as a husband. After a time his search was crowned with success. A very intelligent young Brahman from a distant town, eager to espouse the cause of child widows, and attracted no doubt by the prospect of an intelligent and educated wife, came forward to woo Naraini, and a correspondence began between them.

Unfortunately they were rash enough to use a post-card one or twice, and thus the postmaster discovered the secret. A hurricane of abuse and threats swept over poor Naraini. An uncle broke one day into her house with a naked sword, threatening to kill himself before her if the project were persisted in. But the chief anger and hatred were directed against Rangavachari. Twice an attempt

was made on his life. Naraini's own parents seem to have been secretly favourable to her re-marriage and escape from the miseries of widowhood, but they cowered at the thought of the wrath of their caste people, and as they refused all outward countenance, it was resolved that their daughter should run away.

The resourceful Rangavachari contrived to find means for her to leave the parental roof dressed up as a boy, and in this disguise she lived for some time in her native town, sheltered by an old woman, while the country was being searched for her high and low. From this house she was to be conveyed secretly to a neighbouring town and there take the train to Madras, where her husband was to meet her and have the marriage ceremony immediately performed in the house of some friends who were reformers. Rangavachari himself was to take her to these friends, and he made his plans very carefully.

On a dark night he left the town in a country cart into which Naraini had successfully been smuggled. The twenty-one miles to Dharmapuram were accomplished without mishap, and the tickets were taken at the junction for Madras. But on the platform Naraini was seen and recognised, and the hue and cry was out at once. The couple were arrested and brought before the English magistrate, the charge against Rangavachari being that of abduction of a minor.

Fortunately the magistrate in question was one

who spared no pains to sift a case to the bottom, yet it might have fared badly with the would-be rescuer of the little bride, for lying witnesses were not lacking, and a false horoscope proving Naraini under age was easily produced. But when things looked their blackest, the hearts of the parents, who saw the prison doors again closing upon their child, relented towards her and waxed strong to face the world. They came boldly forward and declared that Rangavachari had acted with their full permission and authority. Naturally the case was dismissed at once, and the marriage took place in due course.

Naraini is now the happy mother of four children, and every year pays a visit with her husband to their benefactor. A cordial friendship exists between the two families, though both, of course, have lost caste through their bold deed. During one of these visits to Rangavachari's house I saw Narainamma, and found her one of the most pleasing and intelligent women I have met in India, and rejoiced heartily that she has been spared the dreary lot of a Brahman widow, and fills instead a sphere of happy usefulness, all through the generosity and determination of one of her own countrymen.

Rangavachari goes far in his contempt of conventionalities, and defies caste prejudices enough not to disdain to drink tea with us. One afternoon he came in while we were at tea, and my friend offered him a cup, but he had hardly tasted it when some

other Brahmans were announced, one or two of the strictest type. He went to receive them for us while we finished tea, and we concluded he would not return and defy caste rules before them all—for the door into the adjoining room was open—yet this was what he did. He came back presently, calmly sipped his tea and helped himself to cake; and I felt the sincerest respect for the man who, so undismayed, followed out his principles. Would that Hinduism produced such as he less rarely!

A doubt crosses my mind as I write the above sentence, whether his active disinterestedness in many directions is wholly a product of Hinduism. For does not the Bhagavatgita emphatically teach: 'The *yogi* is greater than the man of action'?

This disinterestedness showed itself in many ways. For instance, though himself a member of the legal profession, in which it is more common—in India, at any rate—to take advantage of other people's ignorance than to seek diligently to dispel it, he worked hard to redeem the extremely conservative and benighted *ryots* from their state of poverty, ignorance, and stolid stupidity, and to bring modern agricultural knowledge a little nearer to them. Was it not rather the subtle though unrecognised force of Christian ideals which had thus influenced him to energetic action on behalf of others? Ideals which, though unacknowledged, have permeated the atmosphere, and cannot remain inoperative.

But to return to our Theosophical assembly.

Nearest the candle at the other end—for one light had politely been assigned to us—sat a teacher from the Government school, of rather different aspect from the others, who all looked neat and had clean-shaven faces. This man wore no turban, his hair and his beard were long and rather unkempt, and the Vishnu trident in red and white lines glared obtrusively from his forehead and nose; but in spite of his rather ferocious appearance he seemed one of the mildest of men, retiring where others were forward in discussion, and evidently the most scholarly among them, for it was he who was deputed to read the original Sanskrit text of the Gita. A Telugu translation with comments followed, and then various English versions. The discussion was carried on in English.

Ah, that discussion! It embraced many subjects, from the four steps of *Yoga* to the education of children. The desirability of a blank mind occupied us for a long time. To my Western ignorance it did not seem the *summum bonum*, neither did the way in which they recommended it as the process of alluring the thoughts away from evil appear to me the most practical method.

'The mind goes off in the wrong direction, you pull it back, then—a blank, and then direct it towards good,' they explained.

In the middle of that lively mental process 'a blank seemed to me utterly impossible.'

'How can you think of nothing at all when you have just been thinking something, and are presently to think again?'

'Ah! madam,' the Tahsildar replied solemnly, 'that is because you have never tried. This needs practice.'

'It does,' I thought. 'One way would be to leave out all the intermediate steps, and substitute at once a good subject for the bad as food to the mind. To us that seems the more natural way. You know the phrase, "the expulsive power of a new affection"? we should apply that to mind as well as morals, and in this case both are mixed.'

But what seems clear and unanswerable to us is not so to them. The absolute difference between their mode of thought and ours comes upon one occasionally with a shock. Our ideals differ radically. Theirs are all in the direction of passivity and negation, ours in that of the active and the positive, and each to the other seems utterly unattractive.

I have but a hazy recollection of all the things that were said that evening. The gathering was a Theosophical one only in name. The members were not so much Theosophists as Hindus meeting nightly to discuss religious topics. This in itself seems highly praiseworthy. For where in civilised countries do lawyers and Government officials meet every night to discuss religion? Though, on the other hand, it is not so astonishing when one reflects,

firstly, on the naturalness with which the Hindu mind turns to philosophy, and philosophy with them inevitably is mixed with religion; and, secondly, on the domestic atmosphere of these men. When their secular work for the day is over, what attractions do their homes offer? They are, to some extent educated and thoughtful, and their women-folk are mostly neither one nor the other, and real companionship is at present inconceivable. Yet, though they deplore this state of things, the great majority of them help to keep it up. For instance, the Munsif, who could talk so finely and fluently at the meeting about non-attachment, freedom from 'the earthly pairs of opposites' (love and hate, joy and sorrow, anger and attachment, &c.), and fixing the mind only on the highest things, has three wives at home, and is on speaking terms with none.

And yet, at the same time, a strange sense came over me during the evening of the striking sameness of their aim and ours. Union with the Divine, thus they acknowledge their ideal, in terms to which we can to some extent subscribe. From some points of view one cannot but be struck with the underlying similarity of their twilight faith, and the full daylight of Christian truth. We are thankful to realise that in Hindu nature and thought God has not left Himself without witness; that these also have groped after and in measure grasped the truth that in Him we live and move and have our being, and that the

yearning of their spirits has not failed to lead them towards those lofty heights to which we also aspire. But having acknowledged much that is common, one feels all the more deeply that our paths diverge, and diverge, apparently, hopelessly. As an instance, I quote from a letter of Rangavachari to a Christian friend, in which he thus sums up his creed :—

'To me God is no separate entity. Every particle of the universe, both known and unknown, and every force, seen and unseen, form part and parcel of God. To think of God as separate from you or me or from anything in the universe is, I fear, a fallacy.

'My hereafter is the realisation of this oneness in all that we see. The sense of separateness has no place in it. The bliss consists in this absence of the sense of separateness. When we remember that the less separate we feel the happier we grow, as we see in our own lives, surely it would be easy to conceive that ideal spiritual happiness is in the complete absence of this feeling of separation.

'Love is that feeling which makes away with the sense of separateness, and this property is unique to love. It is for this reason that it is made to occupy such a high place in every form of religious thought, it is happiness itself; it is radiating in its nature, making us love more and more, as opposed to absorbing love, which is supposed to be a limited quantity, and to be capable of depreciation.

'In the light of these things I would pray for love.

My prayer cannot be in the form of a petition, as God is no separate entity; I would think of the necessity for love, and try to love wherever I can. This process must make my mind so receptive to love, that as I go on living response must come to me both from within and without. It is my ideal prayer and method of praying.'

At times one cannot but be aware of the great unity existing between us and all earnest souls whose spiritual striving can be expressed thus, and at times, again, of the insuperable barrier erected between us by their denial of a personal God.

To what extent it is possible, while denying a personal God, to feel and think as if, indeed, One existed, may be judged from the following prayer, which, however, it must be understood its writer would not use as a petition—though it is written in the form of one—but only as a consolatory and uplifting form of meditation.

'Krishna, God of Response!

'In Thee are interlaced Love and Intelligence and Will, just as ether is in the universe. All that we see is Thyself, the Lover, the Loved and the Love, the Knower, Known and Knowledge, I, he, it, and you. Yet our ignorance is too thick to realise this oneness. Give us strength to feel less separate from and more in tune with Thy eternal nature. Grant us Thy grace, and teach us to love everything we see as part of Thyself. Give us strength to strive against

every earthly grief, and blinding, narrow selfishness. Let us not be the beginners of others' miseries. Enable every soul to see the eternal goodness in Thy designs and rise above the earthly pairs of opposites with cheer and delight and peace. Respond even to the feeblest of our impulses of love and thought, and, above all, make us hopeful of Thy grace.'

Beautiful as this prayer is, then, it may seem to us to savour of a kind of spiritual sentimentality, and intellectual insincerity,—in thus seeking to reap the emotional and practical benefits of an article of faith most strenuously denied,—which is repellent. It is, at any rate, a most pathetic witness to the unconquerable vitality of that need of the human spirit to which Pantheism has nothing but a mocking answer to offer.

Yet such is the strange difference between Eastern minds and Western, that the deficiencies in their faith which seem to us so deplorable and so intolerable, are not felt by them as such, and conversely, the truths with which we would enrich them attract them not at all. Sin has no place in a pantheistic explanation of the cosmos, and personal immortality, far from being passionately desired, is regarded as a curse.

Such reflections cannot fail often to weigh heavily on the Christian worker in India. Yet even as we went home from the meeting through the dark streets, accompanied by the faithful Srini Vasa Rao, we passed near the house of another Brahman pleader,

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